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Francine Gray Interviews
William Styron Fiction
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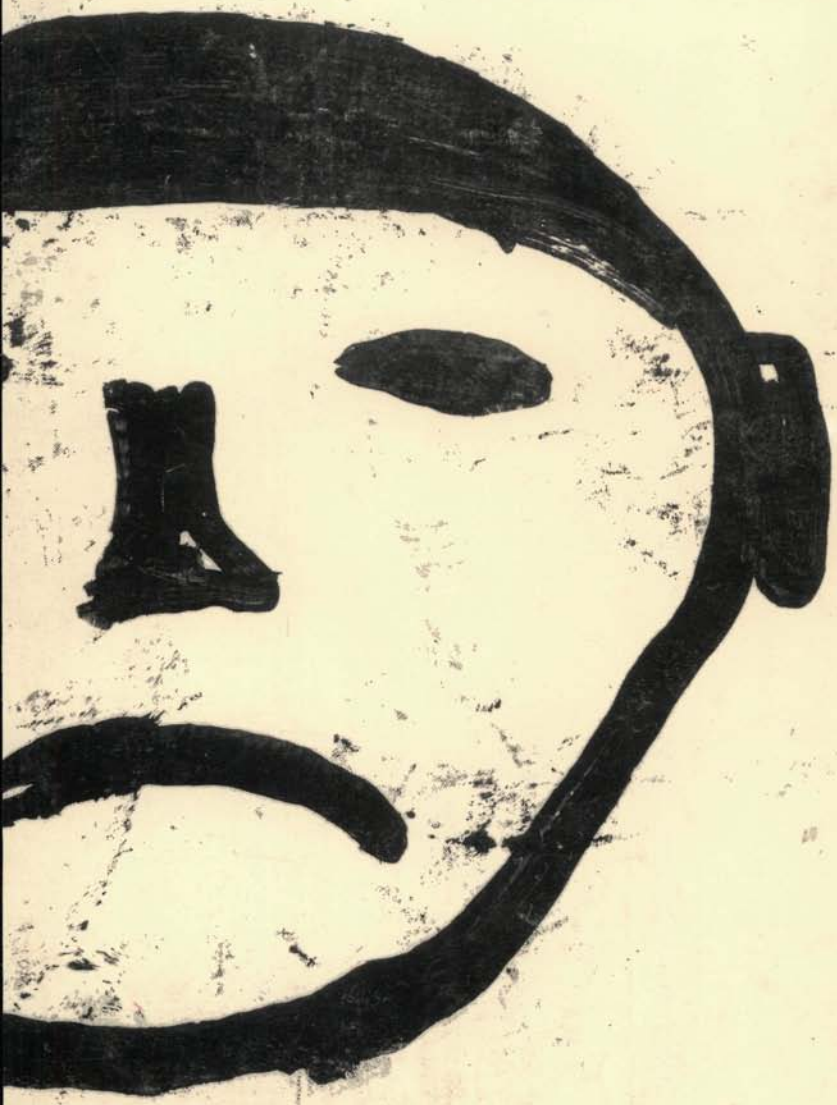

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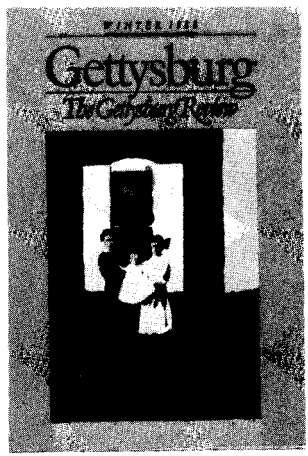

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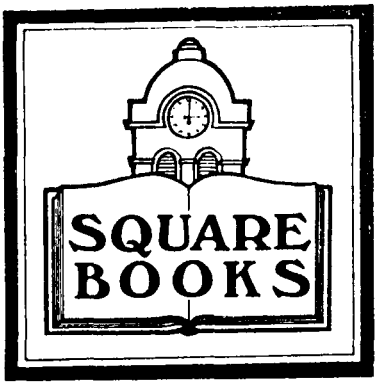

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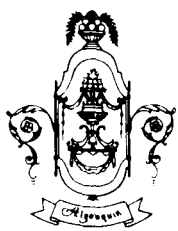

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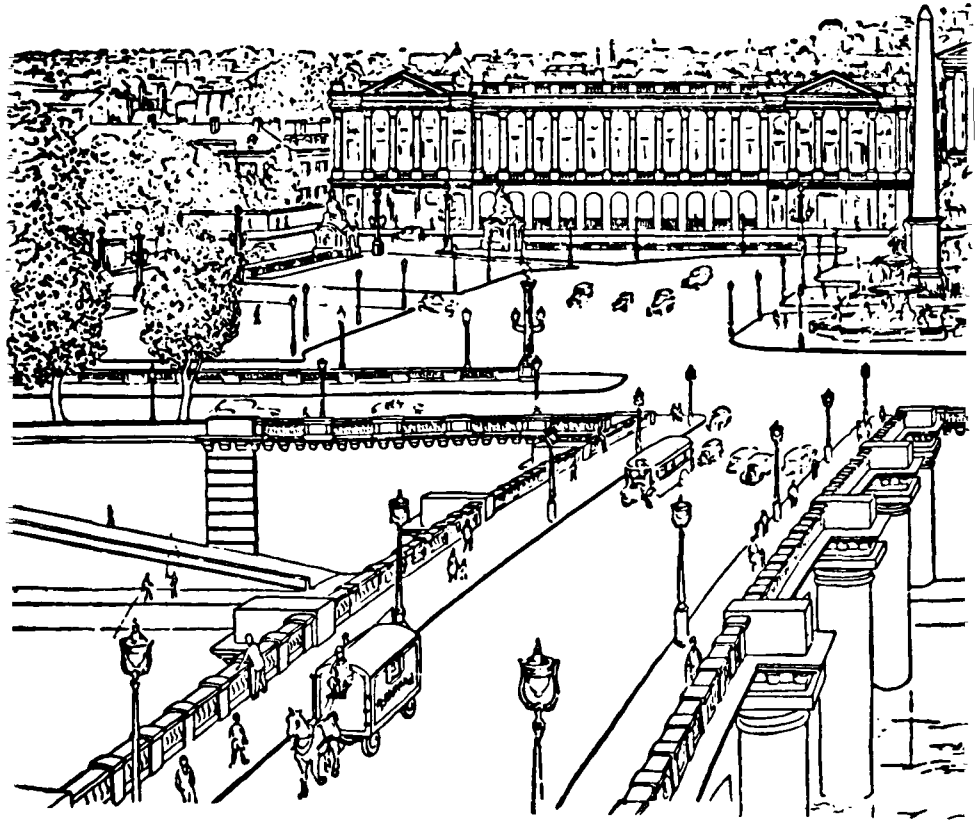

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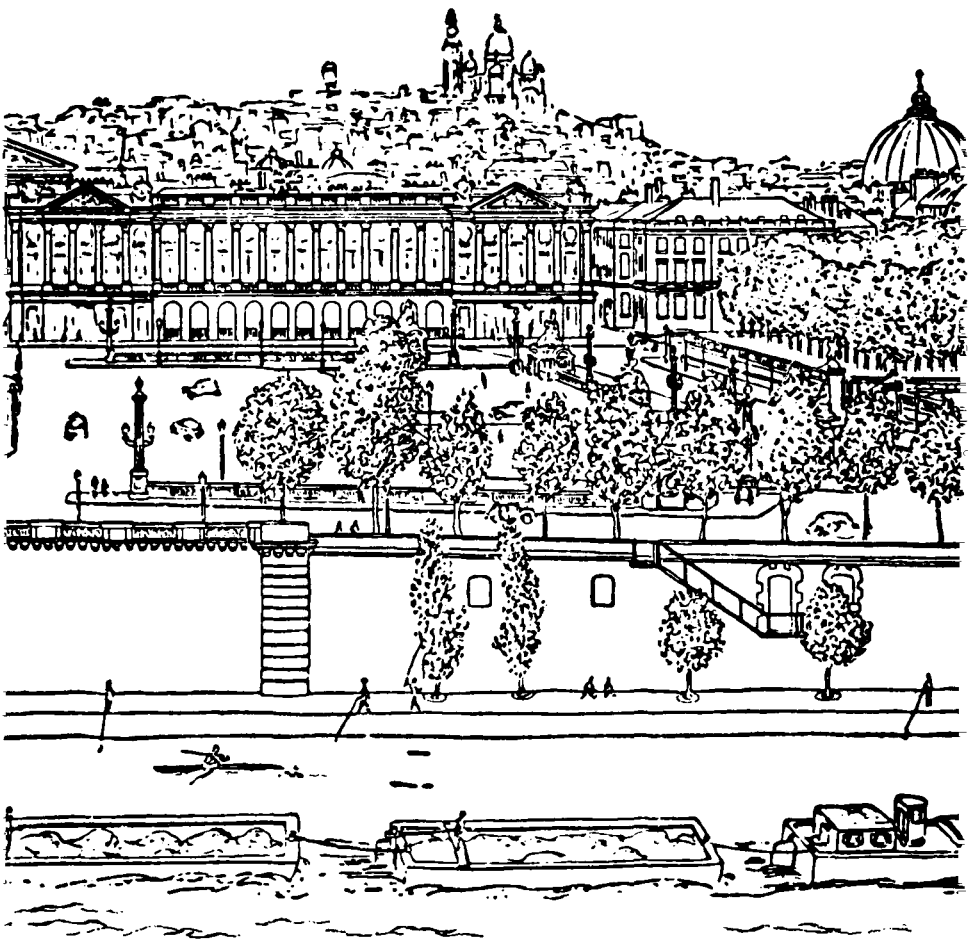

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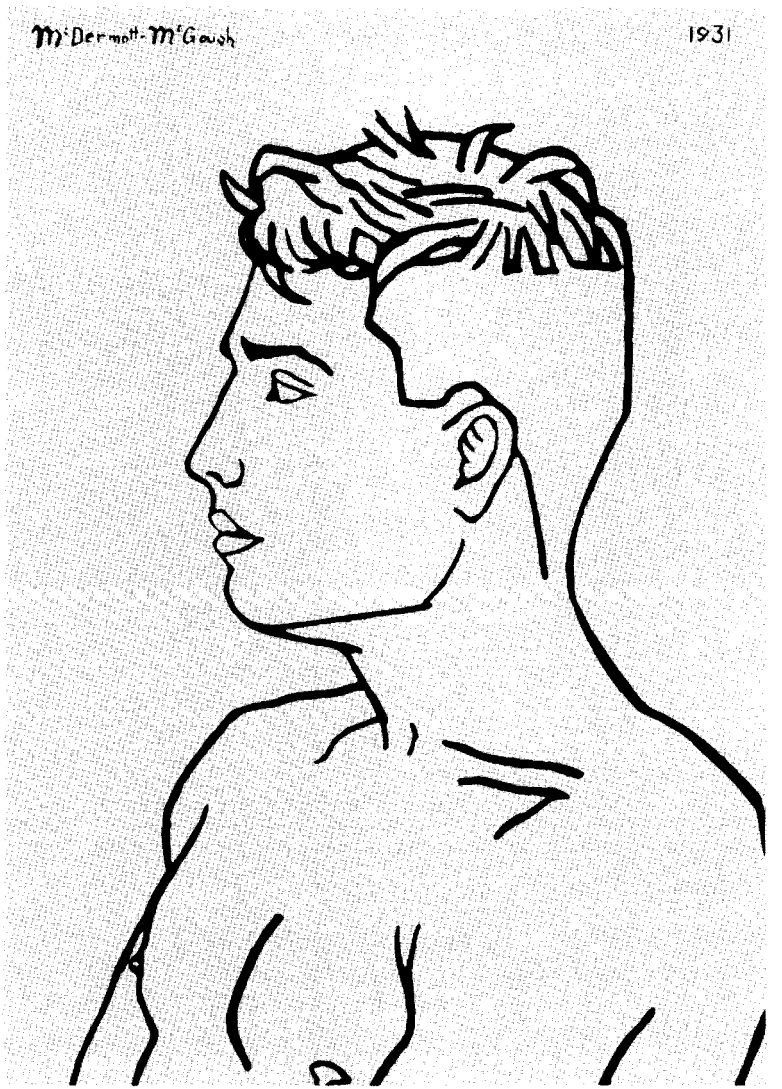

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NOTICE

A cascade of words has been written about the problems of the scow-barge, the *MoBro*, from Islip, Long Island—which in the best tradition of the *Flying Dutchman* has been trying to find a port to discharge its cargo of paper, plastic and rubber products for recycling. The barge has been towed to seven states and three countries so far, all of which have shunted it away. A curious aspect of this tortuous trip is that the shingle-flat barge has not been done in by the weather. Every aerial photograph shows it being towed by the tug *Break of Dawn* across a pond-like azure sea. A little side excursion into the Roaring Forties or an attempt to round the Horn might have solved the problem for everyone. The tugboat captain would turn up in whatever port services the Tierra del Fuego area and mourn: "The towline parted in a howling gale. When I looked again the *MoBro* was gone."

That has not happened. The *MoBro* is back in home seas, moored in Newtown Creek at this writing. The reason for bringing this up is that we suspect that a large portion of the *MoBro*'s cargo is back issues of *The Paris Review*. Islip is approximately thirty miles as the crow flies from my mother's garage in West Hills, Long Island, where back issues of the magazine have been stored starting in the mid-sixties. The garage has room for three cars. My mother has not been able to park a car in there since 1972. From time to time an excess of back

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issues is carted away to Islip—not to make room for a car but for an influx of *new* issues. The last large clearing-out was initiated just before the *MoBro* left on her fateful journey. It is a sorry sight to see the excess back issues move off in bulk in a truck bound for Islip. But it should be noted that back issues of *The Paris Review* are not only biodegradable material suitable for recycling but can be purchased for reading, even *re*-reading. A list of those available for sale has been placed elsewhere in this magazine. In case a reader of this notice should wish to subscribe to *future* copies of the Review a replica of the back of the editorial staff's calling cards is reproduced below. A lot of interest might not solve the *MoBro*'s problems (unless an eager group of readers trek down to Newtown Creek and poke around the barge itself), but it would hold down on future such shipments, aid the magazine itself, and add a few valuable numbers to one's library, as well as allow shelter for my mother's car.

—G.A.P.

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Saipan: July 1945

William Styron

This is an excerpt from a work-in-progress entitled The Way of the Warrior. *The protagonist is Stingo, whom readers will remember from* Sophie's Choice. *—Ed.*

Captain Hipp and his background made me ever more fascinated by a theory I had often played with. Which was: you didn't have to be a Southerner to be a good marine, but it certainly did no harm. There were too many feisty Irish kids from Boston and tough-handed Midwestern farm boys who had risen through the ranks to make the Corps a preserve, as it were, of Dixieland. But I suspected that there was no American organization remotely its size where a Southerner felt so completely at home, or where he could become a star with so little ill-feeling or prejudice. Or where, proportionately, the good ole boys had risen so high. Salute a divisional commanding general out there and over half the time you saluted a Southerner—Gen. Cates from Tennessee, Erskine ("the Big E," they called him) from Louisiana, Howlin' Mad Smith from Alabama, Lem Shepherd from Virginia. The revered Com-

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mandant, Archie Vandegrift, was a Virginian, as was the toughest son of a bitch ever to wear a Marine uniform—my fellow creature of the Tidewater, Chesty Puller, whose house in Saluda I used to gaze on with reverence when, at the beginning of the war, I passed it on the way to school. Puller, who possessed—unimaginably—*four* Navy Crosses, was said to hate second lieutenants (especially reserves) so intensely that he had actually eaten several. Which might have been a joke, but then again—no. During the battle of Peleliu, it had been reliably reported, Colonel Puller called some college dunce of a platoon leader into his tent and the lad was simply never seen again. Where but into his gullet?

Terrified as I might have been of such a commanding officer—during the period not so long before when I was virtually lacking in terror—I would have felt myself lucky to serve under him, for he was a marine par excellence, and I would have been a liar if I had not freely admitted that there was a part of me that responded to such a paragon with admiration. Each one of these gentlemen had the Civil War somewhere in his background (as did I), they all went to V.M.I. or Annapolis or The Citadel or otherwise prepared themselves for the Marines in the conviction that a military career was a noble calling—as noble as the clergy or the law or medicine—and I was witness to the fact that many such Southern professionals, contrary to popular opinion, spoke in gentle voices, drank abstemiously, alluded respectfully to women, and sternly refrained from using the four-letter words they were teethed on. Hipp, born of a somewhat younger generation, was looser in his language but was of the Old School in spirit. It was no accident that that night, in the process of analyzing my platoon's disaster on Okinawa, Hipp invoked the name Longstreet. With only a small stretch of the imagination I could see Hipp himself, blond-bearded, hair in ringlets, sword upthrust, braving the Yankee brimstone and lead at Chickamauga.

Likewise the colonel who delivered our death warrant soon after this. His name was Hankins and he was Operations Officer of the division. Unlike the Army or the Navy, the Marine Corps has never emphasized pretty-boy officers. Fiercely

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ugly and redfaced, with blemishes that helped make him look a little like Sinclair Lewis, he was a Mississippian and as mournful and lean as a buzzard. He spoke in the stately periods of a man accustomed to reading the Bible, Kipling, and the *Reader's Digest*. Why I expected someone more sprightly I didn't know, unless it was the festive nature of the place in which the division officers gathered, the huge amphitheater where Deanna Durbin had aroused the troops with her chaste bodice and high C's, where Bob Hope and Red Skelton had worked what the P.R. flacks had called their "side-splitting wizardry," and where—as the entrance sign announced—Kay Kyser would arrive, if all went well, the following Wednesday, along with his entire Kollege of Musical Knowledge, Ginny Sims, Ish Kabibble, *plus* Wee Bonnie Baker, "the Oh, Johnny! girl." The two beers which had become my customary comfort after breakfast contributed to the insanity I felt. I said (a little too loudly), "Jesus Christ—for this shit we're going to shed our precious blood?" Which I could tell puzzled, and perhaps annoyed, Fulcher and Belcher who were my companions. I think they still regarded me with respect and perhaps even a touch of awe, believing that I was combat-hardened and not having been there long enough to know my Secret Shame—they would learn soon enough.

The invasion of Japan, as outlined by Colonel Hankins, was to be a nightmare. I kept thinking of H. G. Wells. Two enlisted men from Division unrolled on the stage a grandiose, intimidating map: the southern coastal area of the mainland island of Kyushu. Bisected in a north-south direction by a fifty-mile long bay called Kagoshima, the invasion area invited an anthropomorphic comparison which I made rapidly: an enormous iguana with a terrible mouth ready to devour three Marine divisions. And indeed three Marine divisions, plus six Army divisions, were projected for this operation, dubbed "Olympic" by some strategist at the Pentagon. (How were such fateful names really arrived at? I wondered. Did someone finally say: "Hollingsworth, 'Olympic' really sets the tone. Much keener than 'Battleax' or 'Exterminator'!"?) "I need not tell you, gentlemen," Hankins went on, "of the magnitude of

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this operation, beyond doubt the greatest concentration of invasion forces ever mounted in the history of warfare." So far, so good, I thought. Even the prehistoric nomads felt a reassuring safety in numbers, and sixty thousand marines sounded like a lot of company. But hold on there, I thought as I listened to the Colonel, waiting for the catch—a crucial one.

"As you all know, the Japanese are in a weakened position," Hankins continued, "at the moment largely due to the very effective aerial bombardment they are being subjected to. Therefore, I do not wish to discourage the optimism that may have been created by the anticipation of so many fresh, well-trained troops, magnificently equipped, attacking an enemy ground down to some degree by attrition and even deprivation." (There was a large pause, thick swirling haze in the air, everybody nervously smoking.) "But," he continued, "accurate intelligence reports indicate that there are fourteen fully equipped infantry divisions prepared to repulse our joint assault." One could hear a faint gasp at the number fourteen while several hundred marine brains began translating the figure into little berry-brown killer bodies, heads shaking at the appalling total: something close to three hundred thousand. "This does not include several independent mixed brigades and two armored divisions, all of which we have no reason to presume are in anything but excellent fighting condition," he added.

There was another large hesitation, heavy, inauspicious. He said, "It is estimated that this force could and probably will be augmented by auxiliary troops in twice the amount already enumerated." Still another pause while the red blotched face gazed down at us like some backwoods Mississippi evangel, uttering one of those major understatements for which Southern military men have been cherished ever since Lee and Jackson. "It is plain, gentlemen, that our task will be an arduous one."

Then the Colonel illustrated some further problems. This time the G-3 corporals unrolled, in front of the map, an incredibly detailed photo reconnaissance display of the ocean beaches where we would be landing. It took only a second's glance to see how close to impregnable the Japs had made the

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Kagoshima defense, with its devil's playground of pillboxes and minifortresses and bunkers, the beach itself wired and criss-crossed by interlocking lanes of fire and obviously mined so that barely any sand was left visible. Scores of brave men were crowded there, but it would be impossible to exaggerate their reaction when they viewed this awesome stronghold: in an instant the ranks of close-cropped skulls bowed as one, as if clubbed, disbelieving. I heard whispers: *Fuck! Shit! Murder!*

"Of course, all of this will be destroyed by aerial bombings and naval gunfire," said Hankins. To which I heard a major seated next to me murmur: "Wait and see, they'll bring in some Navy meathead to prove it."

And indeed at this point Colonel Hankins interrupted his lecture to introduce a skinny pipe-puffing Navy captain who was attached to the intelligence staff of Admiral Nimitz's headquarters at Pearl Harbor. At the moment he appeared I heard the major at my side, speaking to another officer, say: "Oh Christ, here comes Good News Crews." What he then explained was this: Captain Crews had showed up at briefings previous to the invasions of Tarawa and Saipan, announcing on both occasions that the landing would be a cakewalk for the marines, due to the certain obliteration of the Japanese defenses by naval gunfire and aerial bombardment. In each case tens of thousands of shells had rained down on the islands, and in each case the bombs may as well have been confetti; the Japanese rose from their holes and tunnels virtually unscathed, to fight back more lethally than ever before.

"Christ!" said the major. "Can you imagine them sending Good News Crews again? Listen to this asshole!"

"Good news, gentlemen," said Crews, refiring his Kaywoodie with a lighter. He had stooped shoulders and wore thick glasses which gave him a faltering, presbyopic appearance like that of a jeweler or anyone engaged in squinty-eyed scrutiny of tiny objects—in his case the Tinkertoy horrors awaiting us on the shores of Kyushu. He gestured toward the blowup photo of the landing beaches. He said, "I want to make something unequivocally clear. The elaborate enemy defenses you see displayed here will be effectively reduced to

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rubble long before D-day. This will permit your control over the beaches to a degree unparalleled in this Pacific war. The bombardment will be the heaviest in the history of amphibious warfare, and of the longest duration by far. D-day minus eight will see the initial salvos from battlewagons of the Fifth Fleet, supporting your assault with an unprecedented three thousand vessels—"

"It's the same bullshit," the major said, "only the figures are different."

After more predictions, Crews left the stage. Beer and fatigue had made me a little dopey, so I drowsed as Hankins droned on. When I snapped awake a question-and-answer session was in progress. A major, an executive officer from one of the battalions, was asking Colonel Hankins to kindly confirm or deny the rumors about an innovative style in kamikaze attacks.

"As usual," he replied, "it is difficult to assess the Japanese psychology. I need not tell any of you gentlemen of the suicidal impulse that has been inculcated in the spirit of every Japanese fighting man, and of his utter disregard for his own life. Many of you have experienced this. I can only say with certainty that you will be dealing with a fanatical enemy, probably more disposed to a last ditch defense than any soldier in the annals of warfare. It is also expected that the civilian populace, likewise inculcated, will be prepared to fight to the death. Make no mistake, gentlemen, these are not a self-respecting Caucasian foe like the Germans. They are more like the anthropoid apes in their reaction to danger, and will battle tooth and nail in the protection of their homeland. Even the women and old men will be fighting you with primitive weapons."

I remember stirring uneasily as Fulcher and Belcher responded nervously to these auguries. Jesus save us all, I thought. Suddenly from nowhere I had a vision of some small crazed defender, male or female—it did not matter—harpooning my lungs with a bamboo stick, and I felt more distress than from all the other threats put together.

A certain resignation carried me through to the end of the

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morning's crucifixion—the last nail of which Hankins drove home about an hour and a half after the session began. It was the moment that every officer in the place had been secretly awaiting, with the heart continually sinking: unit assignment. Who's going to dive into that shit first, me or you? If one were a gung ho Marine, as I had been in the old days (a few months before), it was a challenge and a thrill to be in the assault wave of a landing, ratifying through your very corporeal exposure to fire everything you felt about your balls and your bravery. But now to be in one of those reserve units that is part of every landing was something I had truly yearned for. Being in reserve, of course, guaranteed nothing, except perhaps a few more hours of normal breath. The Sixth Marines held in reserve at Tarawa suffered as dreadfully when called in on the second day as the assault units on the first. The same was true for the Third Marine Division at Iwo Jima. Nonetheless, the après vous Alphonse, après vous Gaston delicacy of feeling was very much in force when plans were announced for amphibious operations, and there were few marines save the most reckless and harebrained who did not crave to be in a reserve unit when the trumpets sounded and the admiral called out over the speakers: *Land the landing force.*

But it looked as if "E" Company, Second Battalion, Eighth Marines, would be almost the first troops to set foot on the soil of Japan. As we left the briefing, I sauntered along grinning while Fulcher and Belcher discussed where their own platoons might be situated during the landing. They seemed to consider being first a badge of honor. I was sick with dread. I settled their deliberations by saying goodnaturedly something like: "Listen, you guys, I'm the senior platoon leader in the outfit. I'm going to claim that privilege for myself!" I gave what I thought to be a genuine-sounding laugh, to which the lads responded heartily, as I felt the icicle blade of an underwater obstacle disembowel me from sacrum to sternum.

To a backslid young Christian like myself the thought at that time of having a spiritual exchange with the Chaplain was

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fraught with absurdity and rich humor. I don't mean that I was yet fully purged of some juvenile longing for divine protection. There were dozens of aspects of warfare, each worse than the next, that might have caused one to invent a salvationist theology even if one had never heard of the idea of God. The notion of stepping on a land mine, for instance, riveted me with such incoherent terror that I was almost (but not quite) sent into an atavistic religious tailspin, prepared to do anything—wail Jesus Loves Me, or, like a Holy Roller, perform some obscene act of self-abasement—in order to be spared such a fate. But with a sense of satisfaction and pride appropriate to my agnosticism I had always come to my senses, firm once more in my indifference to the Almighty. I had disavowed God with a twenty-year-old's appalling fury and insolent despair. Since the hot summer of my mother's death, when I stopped up my ears to her screams of agony, He had been outside of my scheme of things and I had paid Him no mind.

In a journal I kept at the time I wrote this: *If I ever had to think of Him at all, or bothered to discuss Him, I would certainly go on the offensive and curse Him rather than praise Him for His Creation, the most ludicrously defective by-product of which is plainly mankind. God and His handiwork have always reminded me of the uncle of the Barlow kids next door in Virginia: while drunk, he ran over and killed the baby in the driveway. It was deemed an accident and he didn't go to jail, but no one ever wanted to talk to him again . . .*

De Lawd's ministers on earth seem to provide the feeblest link between Himself and humanity. Frauds and hypocrites, mostly. If it weren't for the sometimes glorious liturgy that emanates from their mouths, and the lovely polyphonic carols of joy that fill their houses of worship, preachers of the gospel would long ago have been forced to become Fuller brush salesmen. Since I have such built-in scorn for the breed, I am a little amazed at the enormous attraction and sympathy and warmth, etc., that I feel for Chaplain Wickersham, whose odd advances and gentle importunities I would ordinarily flee as

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the field mouse flees the hoot owl. But I have had encounters with him in the past several days and I find him an extraordinary man.

At the officers' mess—where I had occasionally regarded him from a distance—Wickersham had appeared a voluble, hearty person with a chunky face as bland as Wonder bread, a hollow deceiver. Mencken, whom I adored, would have despised him—a man whose natural habitat in peacetime would be bankers' parlors and Chamber of Commerce seances, where he would push for uplift, fellowship, preservation of the hymen and other Christly totems. There was bitter apostasy in my youthful anticlerical view of this man. Mistrusting him as I did, I was surprised when once he returned my glance with a wink—I thought it an optical illusion at first but then understood it as real. I had, magnanimously, given him a single brownie point, since I'd heard he had been in on the Tarawa invasion; in that inferno, even a Doctor of Divinity had to have guts. I forgot him until one day when he tracked me down to the place by the ocean where I had taken to holding counsel with myself during the hour or so we were allowed a small siesta. It was a beautiful little promontory dense with flame trees, isolated and quiet except for the crashing waves, a perfect place for my kind of desperate devotionals. It was especially inviting in contrast to the weird landscape one had to traverse for several hundred yards to reach it. This was one of Saipan's many supply areas. Everything was covered by sheet iron or tarps. On the left there were Everests of weapons—machine guns, mortars, tripods, rifles, BARs, carbines, tons and tons of ammunition, also a staggering amount of packs and shelter halves and cartridge belts, other junk. To the right, quartermaster stores enough to fill twenty department stores; there was *everything*—canned goods (not field rations but thousands of boxes of Campbell's soups, Libby's peaches, Maxwell House coffee and so forth), typewriters, medicines, toilet paper, cologne, toothpaste, Lavoris, suntan lotion, umbrellas, sandals, bubble gum, on and on—I even saw dozens of cartons of bird seed! Who the fuck for? I wondered. The commanding general's parakeets? The message was plain: we were coming

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to Japan to stay and if we didn't chop them to bits with steel we would smother them to death with consumer goods. At any rate the alleyway through this area finally petered out into a meandering path across a patch of jungle, fragrant with what I presumed was hibiscus. There was a cool little stream babbling away where, with a certain amount of subterfuge, I had secreted several dozen cans of beer. (Some I traded for my cigarette allotment, and deftly stole the rest.) I carried three or four cans with me to my ocean promontory, and was in the process of opening the first, when Chaplain Wickersham appeared—hale and hearty enough at the prime of life (he was in his mid-forties), but a little out of breath. I realized that he had, after a fashion, actually stalked me, hustling between the mountain walls of Kleenex and Brillo and then down the jungle path so as not to lose me.

I thought at first that he was going to chat with me about baseball. (A subject which numbed me—I was concerned that the F.B.I. should find out.) At mess, his table had been loudly abuzz with talk about the ratings—who was leading in the leagues "back home," the Lions, Cardinals, Gophers, Woodpeckers, whichever—and I noticed that he seemed as eagerly caught up as the rest of the officers in this mindless palaver; it was my estimation (partly derived from Mencken) that the reverend clergy always parroted their parishioners' fads and fantasies. But after I offered him a beer, which he took with a smile, and we seated ourselves on a couple of rocks, he said quietly: "Let me recite a poem." My heart sank, and I had the wrenching unease that came from the knowledge that my precious hour of solitude would be wrecked by this bore's rendition of something from *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* or "Invictus" or "The Charge of the Light Brigade." "Certainly, sir," I said aloud, but screw you, to myself, wondering what right he had to intrude upon my privacy other than the fact that, being a lieutenant commander, he greatly outranked me.

Thereupon, Wickersham recited "The Second Coming." He gazed out to sea and spoke the words slowly, gravely and with such eloquence and feeling that I felt a shiver go through me—a thrill like a throb of electricity. I had heard those words

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so often before, and had read them scores of times—often enough that any repetition risked seeming stale in my ears—but there was nothing false or orotund in his voice, not a trace of a preacher's baloney, and the last line, which he spoke with an intense and almost newly discovered mystery, left me incredibly moved and a little unstrung.

He said nothing for a while, sipping at his beer, then turned to me and murmured, "You see, I saw you reading your volume of Yeats the other day outside the mess hall. I love his work. He may be the greatest of all modern poets. You don't observe many guys reading Yeats out here. And so I thought we might have something in common." He gave a gentle, unobtrusive laugh and said, "For God's sake, I hope you didn't think I was one of these Come to Jesus fellows!"

"No sir," I said, greatly relieved.

"Most marines regard the chaplain as a receptacle of platitudes," he said, "which is often all too true, I'm afraid. I'll bet you I'm the only Christian minister in the Navy who could tell you what Yeats means in that poem when he speaks of *Spiritus Mundi*. Or who would know that gyre is not a piece of radar equipment." He paused for an instant, and gazed again out to sea—undulating like liquid moss, flecked with spray, its sense of infinitude disturbed only by the sound of planes, buzzing up around the sun as incessantly as wasps in a hot attic. He said, "I know of no poem that so well captures the spirit of this ghastly century we live in."

It was natural, I supposed, because of his age and seniority, that he would take the lead in the conversation, initiating subjects and asking me questions about myself that were gentle, discreet and anything but crude or nosey. Wickersham was plainly a man of learning, widely read but casual, poised, unpretentious. He said he'd written some essays, for church publications, on William Blake. He asked me about other poets—like me, he was devoted to Donne, Herrick, Marvell & Co., also Emily Dickinson and Whitman and Mr. Eliot—and we talked about prose writers, too. I confessed a small yen for becoming a writer someday, told him I was keeping a journal just to prevent the rust from settling on whatever gift I had for the language, and declared point-blank it was my ambition to write

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a novel before I was twenty-five. It was difficult as a marine platoon leader on Saipan to utter the last statement without having one's face freeze into an expression of masklike irony, and being forced to add—as I did—a mock-dramatic line like: "Should fate permit such an unlikely eventuality, that is." To which he replied with what I thought was splendid honesty—nothing buoyantly hopeful, nothing false: "Yes, I was at that briefing. It doesn't leave anyone with much room to think of future plans, does it?"

But before I could reply to that, he said: "You know, one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you is—well, am I right? I think you're in trouble."

I felt as if I'd been stabbed. How did he know? But I answered: "Yes sir, you're right."

"Knock off the sir," he said, then went on: "If you want to let it out, that's fine. It's part of my job. But you don't have to say anything."

"How could you tell?" I said.

"I've been with the Marines since before Guadalcanal," he replied, "I've learned the signs. I know what it means when a young officer gets that solitary, unapproachable look—when he stays apart from the rest a little too often. When he gets—well, looking just a bit seedy. Did you shave this morning?"

Even as he asked the question my fingers went up to stroke the stubble on my chin. "No," I said, "as a matter of fact I didn't."

"I don't want to be too personal," he said, "I'm not your battalion commander. But that's what I mean."

"I appreciate it," I said. For a moment I had been intensely uneasy but now I relaxed, feeling a touch of gratitude.

"Also, you can drink all the beer you like and I won't tell. But to me it would be still another sign of something eating you."

"I appreciate that, too," I said, as the can of Schlitz turned clammy in my hand. "Interestingly enough, I *have* noticed that my fondness for alcohol has moved into another dimension."

"Escape?" said Wickersham.

"I guess you could call it that." And I spilled it all out then:

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the several calamities I had discussed on the earlier night with Captain Hipp, and how as a one-time hotshot platoon leader I might have been resilient enough to endure any single one of these blows but not all of them; and how the consequent anxiety, diurnal and unceasing, pressing down upon me in a way I had never conceived possible (I told him I understood for the first time the meaning of "yoke," the anxiety felt like an actual hundred-pound hardwood yoke around my shoulders), had rendered me virtually incapable of performing the duties I had once performed with devotion and distinction. Had reduced me—putting it plainly, and using a measurement beloved by marine mortarmen—to a state just a cunt's hair removed from non compos mentis.

"I really was a hell of a good marine," I said to the Chaplain, after telling him all this, "but the marine I was seems to be another person. I can't believe I was gung ho like that other guy, with everything in high gear and so well put together." Suddenly I stopped, thinking: Jesus Christ, here I am like a character in a joke, pouring out my troubles to the Chaplain.

Wickersham sensed my embarrassment. He said, "Don't say anything more if you don't want to. But I do get the idea. It seems to me you have a legitimate beef in being rather roughly buffeted by some nasty wind of circumstance." He paused, then said: "Don't you think you have the kind of stuff to beat back this demon?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Why don't we let it rest there for the moment then?" he said. "You've got time enough to work this out." Then he glanced at his watch and rose to his feet, saying, "I'm glad we've had a chance to talk."

On the way back to camp he told me something about his life. Before the war he spent ten years as a missionary in Japan. He was a Methodist (plainly not the teetotaling kind), and had made it his plan to stay as long as he could in Japan, when the war came. He implied that it was not easy being a Christian gospel-spreader among the Japanese, since in recent years the government had put all sorts of obstacles in the way of foreign religious workers, especially Americans. (I felt that I must

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have been utterly poisoned by my lack of faith since I simply couldn't visualize this lover of Yeats trudging around and teaching the wee bucktoothed folk a hymn like "Rock of Ages," which I had always regarded as peculiarly gaunt and Anglo-Saxon and peculiarly revolting. *Wok of Ages, creft for me*, I whispered. Jesus!)

He spoke fluent Japanese and was obviously deeply involved in Japanese culture, traditions and history. He would have been interned or imprisoned when the war started, but at the time of Pearl Harbor he was on leave, or furlough, in a small town in Ohio where he was born and reared. Extraordinary, I thought, all this: he was plainly incapable of hating the Japanese like all marines and sailors did with such ferocity, yet at the same time he was a true-blue, cornfed American (in the good, homely sense of those words) and said he had signed up in the Chaplain Corps less than a month after the bombs fell on Pearl Harbor. He refused to take a cushy Washington intelligence job which he could have had because of his language skills. I ventured to ask him if—since he didn't regard the enemy as rabid little apes like the rest of us did, but as human beings—he might not feel as certain chaplains must have felt during the Civil War, watching brother destroy brother. He replied that that was an accurate observation, although he was still capable of a kind of gut rage at the enemy. He said that to see a people of such decency and civilization go on this rampage of barbarous, fanatical cruelty filled him with horror, made him afraid for the whole human race. "If they can do this," he said, "then anyone can. *We* can."

He added—almost as an afterthought—that he had been married to a Japanese woman. They had a two-year-old son. While on another trip to Ohio about ten years ago both the wife and child died within days of each other, of polio. There was not a whisper of self-pity in his voice when he told me this. How peaceful it must be to cling to faith, as Wickersham does, with all one's heart and soul, I thought. Rock of Ages, cleft for me. Let me hide myself—oh shit, somewhere.

I mused for the first time in days on my carbine with the single bullet in its chamber.

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Joseph Brodsky

The Hawk's Cry in Autumn

Wind from the northwestern quarter is lifting him high
above
the dove-gray, crimson, umber, brown
Connecticut Valley. Far beneath,
chickens daintily pause and move,
unseen, in the yard of the tumbledown
farmstead; chipmunks blend with the heath.

Now adrift on the airflow, unfurled and alone,
all that he glimpses: the hills' lofty, ragged
ridges, the silver stream that threads
quivering like a living bone
of steel, badly notched with rapids,
the townships like strings of beads

strewn across New England. Having slid down to nil,
thermometers—those household gods in niches—
freeze, inhibiting thus the fire
of leaves and churches' spires. Still,
no churches for him. In the windy reaches,
undreamt of by the most righteous choir,

he soars in a cobalt-blue ocean, his beak clamped shut,
his talons clutched tight into his belly
—claws balled up like a sunken fist—
sensing in each wisp of down the thrust
from below, glinting back the berry
of his eyeball, heading south-southeast

to the Rio Grande, the Delta, the beech-groves
and further still:
to a nest hidden in the mighty groundswell
of grass whose edges no fingers risk,

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sunk amid forest's odors, filled
with splinters of red-speckled egg-shell,
with a brother or a sister's ghost.

The heart overgrown with flesh, down, feather, wing,
pulsing at feverish rate, non-stopping,
propelled by internal heat and sense,
the bird goes slashing and scissoring
the autumnal blue, yet by the same swift token,
enlarging it at the expense

of its brownish speck, barely registering on the eye,
a dot, sliding far above the lofty
pine-tree; at the expense of the empty look
of that child, arching up at the sky,
that couple that left the car and lifted
their heads, that woman on the stoop.

But the uprush of air is still lifting him
higher and higher. His belly feathers
feel the nibbling cold. Casting a downward gaze,
he sees the horizon growing dim;
he sees as it were the features
of the first thirteen colonies whose

chimneys all puff out smoke. Yet it's their total within his sight
that tells the bird of his elevation,
of what altitude he's reached this trip.
What am I doing at such a height?
He senses a mixture of trepidation
and pride. Heeling over a tip

of wing, he plummets down. But the resilient air
bounces him back winging up to glory,
to the colorless icy plane.
His yellow pupil darts a sharp glare
of rage, that is a mix of fury
and terror. So once again

he turns and plunges down. But like walls return

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rubber balls, like sins send a sinner to faith, or near,
he's driven upward this time as well!
He! whose innards are still so very warm!
Still higher! Into some blasted ionosphere!
That astronomically objective hell

of birds that lacks oxygen, and where the milling stars
play millet served from a plate or crescent.
What, for the bipeds, has always meant
height, for the feathered is the reverse.
Not with his puny brain but with shriveled air-sacs
he guesses the truth of it: it's the end.

And at this point he screams. From the hook-like beak
there tears free of him and flies *ad luminem*
the sound erinyes make to rend
souls: a mechanical, intolerable shriek,
the shriek of steel that devours aluminum;
"mechanical," for it's meant

for nobody, for no living ears:
not man's, not yelping foxes',
not squirrels hurrying to the ground
from branches, not tiny field-mice whose tears
can't be avenged this way, which forces
them into their burrows. And only hounds

lift up their muzzles. A piercing, high-pitched squeal,
more nightmarish than the D-sharp grinding
of the diamond cutting glass,
slashes the whole sky across. And the world seems to reel
for an instant, shuddering from this rending.
For warmth burns space in the highest as

badly as some iron fence down here
brands incautious gloveless fingers.
We, standing where we are, exclaim
"There!" and see far above the tear
that is a hawk, and hear the sound that lingers
in wavelets, a spider-skein

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swelling notes in ripples across the blue vault of space
whose lack of echo spells, especially in October,
an apotheosis of pure sound.
And caught in this heavenly patterned lace,
star-like, spangled with hoarfrost powder,
silver-clad, crystal-bound,

the bird sails to the zenith, to the dark-blue high
of azure. Through binoculars we foretoken
him, a glittering dot, a pearl.
We hear something ring out in the sky,
like some family crockery being broken,
slowly falling aswirl,

yet its shards, as they reach our palms, don't hurt
but melt when handled. And in a twinkling
once more one makes out curls, eyelets, strings,
rainbow-like, multicolored, blurred
commas, ellipses, spirals, linking,
heads of barley, concentric rings—

the bright doodling pattern the feather once possessed,
a map, now a mere heap of flying
pale flakes that make a green slope appear
white. And the children, laughing and brightly dressed,
swarm out of doors to catch them, crying
with a loud shout in English, "Winter's here!"

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Five Poems by James Lasdun

The Two of Them

Their lives are turning into gold. The door
Bristles with brass, its own commissionaire—
A valedictory hand swims up
Through metal as I grasp it, then the glare
Of summer spills like lacquer on the floor.

I step inside. A domed clock's pendulum
Taps out a rally. Under glass, the spring
Visibly unwinds. It's like a body
Flayed open for its soul, where everything
But the invisible, heartbeat-beaten drum

Of time itself is shown . . . Their rooms withhold
No secrets; I deduce the two of them
From every corner—even a window-box,
The alchemist in the tulip stem
Transmuting earth to shells of glassy gold;

They're in this sheen, from mornings when I'd watch
One of them brush the zodiacs of dust
From varnished wood, the yellow cotton's dark
Reflection rising, brightening, till just
As it was turning into gold, the touch

Of its own substance snuffed it out . . . Sometimes
I find them in the garden, gin in hand,
The fizz still showering upward through the glass,
While insects brush their skin like sprinkled sand
And lazy fingers spin a bowl of limes—

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Summer evenings . . . silence like a sheet
Pockmarked by a sound, beyond the wall,
Like a giant clock—and once or twice a night,
A golden, almost luminous tennis ball
Drops from the dark blue, bounces round our feet,

A compact imp that skitters on in fun,
Idling to a halt at someone's chair,
And then it's like a chill, and I imagine
Arriving to discover no one here,
The two of them now one of them, now none.

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Jumping

He meets you at the zoo. You stand and watch
The mossy, boulder-headed bison hump
Their buttressed tonnage round a patch of dust,
A cayman's eyelid flash its mineral sump,
Flamingoes, sea-shell pink, curled up asleep
On cocktail stems of leg, a cheetah pick
The last pink shred of membrane from a bone,
Insect analogies of leaf and stick . . .
A brochure of solutions—every feature
Fashioned like serrations on a key
To prise existence from a precise world
As far from here as yours is. What you see
Mirrors in wing and tusk, night-eyes, webbed feet,
Your own precise and private arsenal
For getting by—each weapon obsolete.

So you permit him to walk you home,
Assenting as he hovers at the door,
As if assent were all you had to lock
What happens now with what has gone before—
This ice-thin plateau of the present, poised
Like crystal on a juggler's column—
Miracles of balance hold you here,
Tremulous, a stranger in your room
Eyeing the bed, the map pinned on the wall—
He makes a tease of searching for your town—
His fingers brush Alaska, skim the Yukon,
Rockies, *warmer warmer*, plunging down
Nebraska, Oklahoma, *further south*,
Tracing the Mississippi, *hot that's hot*,
Vicksburg, Louisiana, the hot mouth . . .

Then by and by your moon-lit bodies sprawl
Entangled. You're asleep but not at rest,
Flushed hot and cold, an ember's red-black shimmer,

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Your face a frown, twitching on his breast—
Wherever you are you're not here;
That muscle quivering in your hip
Is fear of heights—you're balanced on a ledge,
And miles beneath you, willing you to slip,
Behemoth, Cockatrice, misshapen hybrid
Slavering in shadow; the day's nightmare
Spawn of beast on reptile, bird on fish—
And then you jump, and crashing through the air
Towards you comes the creature of your dream,
Its double head familiar . . . one is yours,
The other's watching as you wake, and scream.

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A Dinosaur in Rome

Dolphins at every corner, bees
The size of fists, and pinecones
Bigger than the Pope's crown—
But all of these,
Like the million frilled scallop shells
Cropping up as fonts or
Merely gratuitous scagliola,
Were of granite, basalt, porphyry:

The organic lapsed into stone,
A city yearning to be wilderness
Again—but not really;
Keeping these mascots
Like photos of an ex who might occasionally
Lubricate a fantasy
But whose bodily presence
Would only embarrass.

I was near the Quirinale barracks,
Outside a walled garden (foamy
Overspill of jasmine and white lilac)
When I saw it—
Stockstill on the pavement, shocked rigid
By its drop from Paradise,
Head like a little flint arrow
Cocked up in astonishment,

Body a nothing, a brittle twig,
A thin bean-pod into which
Some whimsical garden-god had squirted
A volt of life—
An afterthought, a scribble; pencilled into creation,
As easily erased;
I nudged it lightly, expecting
An electric, trigger-reflex scuttle

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To safety—but it hardly moved,
Then wouldn't move at all, except to slide
Where I pushed it (suction-pad feet
  Splayed out like tiny flowers)
But its weakness was like a fulcrum over which
My own strength seemed to pivot, as it stared
At its greenless future in an impossible
Mineral kingdom, and refused it.

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Tea with a Politician

A day painted like a child's room
In bright colours; red pillar box
Where Loomis mailed your pristine letters
(Deferential among his betters
He tipped his hat to us), pink bloom
Of blossom ruched like dancers' frocks—

We passed a constable in blue
Guarding your door against—what?
Avenging citizens who'd voted
For someone else? Your own much-quoted
'Essential labour surplus' who
Would give their pittance to see you shot?

Your house revealed a curious taste
For hybrid forms; a figurine
Fused into a branch of coral
Was Daphne changing to a laurel,
And in a mounted shell were placed
Glass lilies, stained frost-white and green—

A cultivated passion, yet
Quite in keeping with your own
Change from dignified Patrician
To our 'Most Pelted Politician'
Glistening absurdly with the wet
Pearl and gold of an eggshell crown;

And what would you say if you knew
That I was among the enemy?
I, who had eaten at your table,
Barracking, though still unable
To hurl more than abuse at you,
Keeping my head down guiltily—

How would you accommodate
Such treachery, could you admire
One who'd sacrifice his class's
Better interest to the mass's,
Or would you tell me what I hate
Is what I secretly desire?

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Picture of a Girl

I lie on the dirty white candlewick
You so disliked, thinking of you at your best;
Among animals mostly—Absalom
Whose high, unearthly screech you mimicked once
So fluently, he swooped from his chimney perch
To strut before us on the rain-fresh lawn,
Rustling green plumage as if a mate
Had bloomed there like the cêpes and chanterelles . . .
And then the cats; Babette, whose dynasty
Had frayed the Morris hangings into shreds—
I remember you struggling to hold all twelve
Still in your lap for a photograph;
That night you giggled quietly in your sleep—
Lovely transparent dreamer, I could see
The singed-beige kittens tumbling there again . . .

Now I recede, the years are like rough stones
Glazed to a moonstone glimmer by the sea,
Fantastical—Absalom cries again,
I hear that garden crackling in the rain,
Pale dusty green mimosa's saffron burrs
Turning to paste as they brush our clothes,
Quicksilver raindrops on the soft peach fuzz—
We lived well, I remember starched linen,
Silver, the flayed blue hearts of hot-house figs,
My profligate goddess stooping where a marrow
Had burst with rain, and spilt its sequin seeds,
The clouds pitted like granite, but tissue-light,
Heaving their slow collisions in the skies,
And where the pond froze up one winter night
Big golden carp alive beneath the ice . . .

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Three Poems by Franz Wright

Duration

On the sill
the blown-out candle

burning
in the past . . .

Frozen clouds
passing over

the border
north. Listen

to the end,
listen with me.

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Entry in an Unknown Hand

And still nothing happens. I am not arrested.
By some inexplicable oversight

nobody jeers when I walk down the street.

I have been allowed to go on living in this
room. I am not asked to explain my presence
anywhere.

What posthypnotic suggestions were made; and
are any left unexecuted?

Why am I so distressed at the thought of taking
certain jobs?

They are absolutely shameless at the bank—
you'd think my name meant nothing to them. Non-
chalantly they hand me the sum I've requested,

but I know them. It's like this everywhere—

they think they are going to surprise me: I,
who do nothing but wait.

Once I answered the phone, and the caller hung up—
very clever.

They think that they can scare me.

I am always scared.

And how much courage it requires to get up in the
morning and dress yourself. Nobody congratulates
you!

At no point in the day may I fall to my knees and
refuse to go on, it's not done.

I go on

dodging cars that jump the curb to crush my
hip,

accompanied by abrupt bursts of black-and-white
laughter and applause,

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past a million unlighted windows, peered out at
by the retired and their aged attack-dogs—

toward my place,

the one at the end of the counter,

the scalpel on the napkin.

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North Country Entries

Do you still know these early leaves, translucent, shining, spreading on their branches like green flames?

And the hair-raising stars flowing over the ridge late at night . . .

No one home in the house by itself on the pine-hidden road,

or the 4-story barn up the road, leaning on its hill.

The two horses who've opened the gate to their field, old, wandering around on the lawn.

The sky becoming ominous.

Which is more awful, a sentient or endlessly presenceless sky?

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Donald Hall

Prophecy

I will strike down wooden houses; I will burn aluminum
clapboard skin; I will strike down garages
where crimson Toyotas sleep side by side; I will explode
palaces of gold, silver, and alabaster: the summer
greathouse and its folly together. Where shopping malls
spread plywood and plaster out, and roadhouses
serve steak and potatoskins beside Alaska King Crab;
where triangular flags proclaim tribes of identical campers;
where airplanes nose to tail exhale kerosene,
weeds and ashes will drowse in continual twilight.

I reject the old house and the new car; I reject
Tory and Whig together; I reject the argument
that modesty of ambition is sensible because the bigger
they are the harder they fall; I reject Waterford;
I reject the five and dime; I reject Romulus and Remus;
I reject Martha's Vineyard and the slamdunk contest;
I reject leaded panes; I reject the appointment
made at the tennis net or on the seventeenth green;
I reject the Professional Bowling Tour;
I reject purple bathrooms with purple soap in them.

Men who lie awake worrying about taxes, vomiting
at dawn, whose hands shake as they administer Valium,
skin will peel from the meat of their thighs.
Armies that march all day with elephants past pyramids
and roll pulling missiles past Generals weary of saluting
and past President-Emperors splendid in cloth-of-gold,
rain will dissipate soft rumps of armies. Where square miles
of corn waver above Minnesota plains, where tobacco ripens
in Carolina and apples in New Hampshire, where soybeans
turn Kansas green, where pulpmills stink in Oregon,

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dust will blow in the darkness and cactus die
before it flowers. Where skiers wait for chairlifts
wearing money, low raspberries will part rib-bones.
Where the drive-in church raises a chromium cross,
dandelions and milkweed will straggle through blacktop.
I will strike from the ocean with waves afire;
I will strike from the hill with rainclouds of lava;
I will strike from darkened air
with melanoma in the shape of decorative hexagonals.
I will strike down embezzlers and eaters of snails.

I reject Japanese smoked oysters, potted chrysanthemums
allowed to die, Beefeaters on the rocks, Ronald
McDonald, Holsteins wearing electronic necklaces,
Thomas Jefferson, capped teeth, and Tunisian aqueducts;
I reject Phi Beta Kappa keys, Great Danes, carpenters
jogging on the median, and Mozart for the second-grader
eating watercress sandwiches; I reject Dexedrine;
I reject shadows in the corner of the atrium
where Phyllis or Phoebe speaks with Billy or Marc
who says that afternoons are best although not reliable.

Your children will wander looting the shopping malls
for forty years, suffering for your idleness,
until the last dwarf body rots in a parking lot.
I will strike down lobbies and restaurants in motels
carpeted with shaggy petrochemicals
from Maine to Hilton Head, from the Scagit to Tucson.
I will strike down hanggliders, wiry adventurous boys;
their thighbones will snap, their brains
slide from their skulls. I will strike down
families cooking wildboar in New Mexico backyards.

The landscape will clutter with incapable machinery,
acres of vacant airplanes, schoolbuses, and ploughs
with seedlings sprouting through discs and turning brown.
Letterless dwarves will burrow for warmth and shelter
in the caves of dynamos and Plymouths, dying
of old age at seventeen. Tribes wandering

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in the wilderness of their ignorant desolation,
who suffer from your idleness, will burn your illuminated
missals to warm their rickety bodies.
Terrorists assemble plutonium because you are idle

and industrious. The whippoorwill shrivels and the pickerel
chokes under the governance of self-love. Vacancy burns
the air so that you strangle without oxygen like the rat
in the biologist's belljar. The living god sharpens
the scythe of my prophecy to strike down the red
poppies and the blue cornflowers. When priests and
policemen
strike my body's match, Jehovah will flame out;
Jehovah will suck air from the vents of bombshelters.
Therefore let the Buick swell until it explodes;
therefore let anorexia starve and bulimia engorge.

I reject Toy Town; I reject picnics with silver and linen
out of baskets from Abercrombie & Fitch; I reject
Tupperware parties and antiques bargained away
from feckless inhabitants; I reject Milorganite;
I reject the Algonquin and the Hyatt Embarcadero;
I reject BMWs with CBs in them; I reject the Taj Mahal;
I reject Otho, I reject Dan Rather, I reject living
in the present, I reject history, I reject coq au vin;
I reject betrayal that engorges the corrupt heart;
I reject idleness that longs for criminal surrender.

When Elzira leaves the house wearing her tennis dress
and drives her black Porsche to meet Abraham,
quarrels, returns to husband and children, and sobs
asleep, drunk, unable to choose among them,
lawns and carpets will turn into tar together
with lovers, husbands, and children.
Fat will boil in the sacs of children's clear skin.
I will strike down the nations, astronauts and judges;
I will strike down Babylon, I will strike acrobats,
I will strike algae and the white birches.

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Because Professors of Law teach graft and bribery,
let the movieactor become President; because Chief
Executive
Officers and Commissars collect down for pillows,
let the injustice of cities burn city and suburb;
let the countryside burn; let the pineforests of Maine
explode like a kitchenmatch and the Book of Kells
become ash in a microsecond; let oxen and athletes
flash into grease: I return to Appalachian rocks;
I shall eat bread and prophesy through hours or millenia
of Jehovah's day as the sky turns rose above cities.

Then houses will burn, even houses of alabaster;
the sky will disappear like a scroll rolled up
and hidden in a cave from the generation of idleness.
Mountains will erupt and vanish becoming deserts
and the sea wash over the sea's lost islands
and the earth split like a corpse's gassy
stomach and the sun turn as black as a widow's skirt
and the full moon grow red with blood swollen inside it
and stars fall from the sky like wind-blown apples,
while Babylon's managers burn in the rage of the Lamb.

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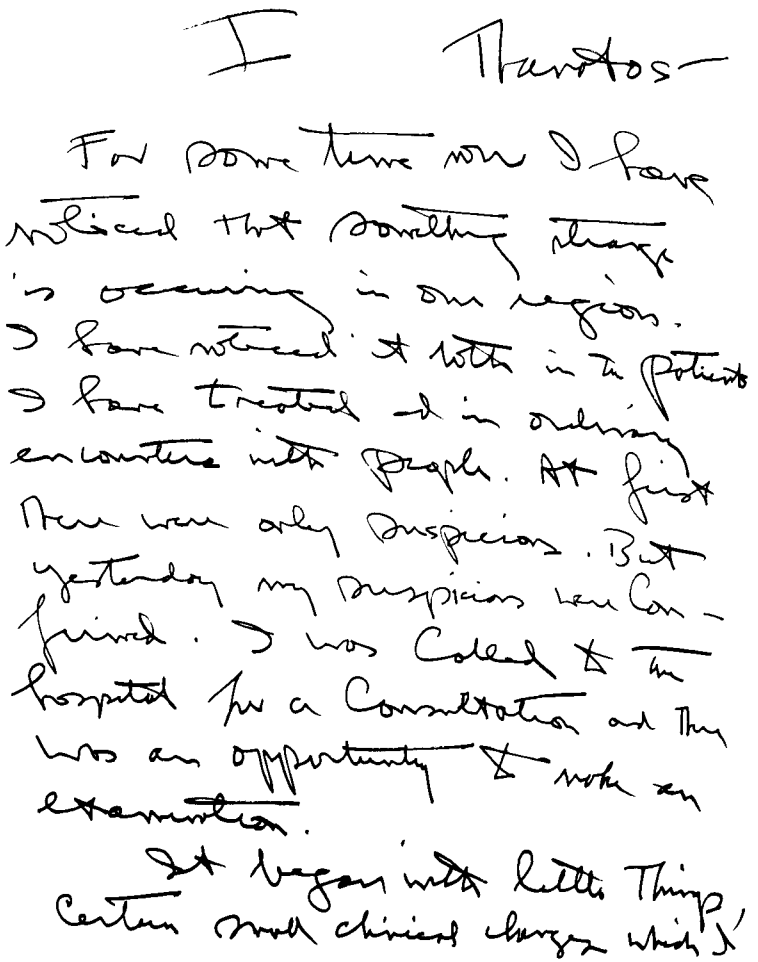
I Thanatos—

For some time now I have noticed that something strange is occurring in our region. I have noticed it both in the patients I have treated and in ordinary encounters with people. At first there were only suspicions. But yesterday my suspicions were confirmed. I was called to the hospital for a consultation and thus was an opportunity to make an examination.

It began with little things, certain small clinical changes which I

A manuscript page from Walker Percy's most recent novel, The Thanatos Syndrome.

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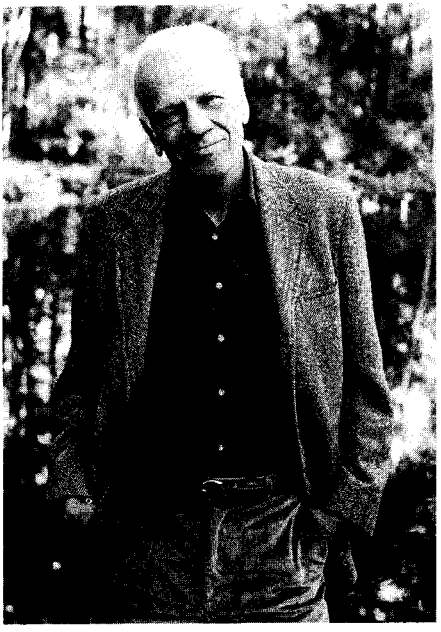

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The Art of Fiction XCVII
Walker Percy

Orphaned at a young age, Walker Percy was raised by his adoptive father, the poet and memoirist William Alexander Percy. He studied chemistry and mathematics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and went on to medical school at Columbia University. His studies there were halted, however, when he contracted tuberculosis. Though he has never abandoned his interest in the sciences in general, and psychiatry in particular, during his long convalescence he came to realize, he says, that the individual "will be left out of even the most rigorous scientific formulation."

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As one of America's foremost novelists, Percy likens his role to that of "the canary the coal miners used to take down into the shaft with them, to test the air." His books—The Moviegoer *(1961),* The Last Gentleman *(1966),* Love in the Ruins *(1971),* The Message in the Bottle *(1975),* Lancelot *(1977),* The Second Coming *(1980),* Lost in the Cosmos *(1983), and, most recently,* The Thanatos Syndrome *(1987)—reflect that sense of prophetic mission. They are propelled by a sharply defined moral vision which reflects a rare diversity of influences—the work of the existentialists, particularly Kierkegaard and Marcel; the novels of Camus, Sartre, Dostoyevsky, Faulkner and others; his background in the sciences; and, later in life, his conversion to Catholicism.*

This interview was conducted by mail, from May to October 1986, at an enormous geographical distance; but the interviewer does cherish the memory of a personal meeting. It was on May 4, 1973, a warm Louisiana evening, at Percy's home in Covington, a small town at the northern end of the causeway running above Lake Pontchartrain (New Orleans is at the southern end). The house is in a wooded area by the bayou, along the Bogue Falaya River. Percy is a tall, slender, handsome man, with a distinguished and thoughtful mien. His manner that day was unassuming, gracious and gentle. Since then, his graying hair may have become grayer; but judging from our correspondence, he is still the same warm, helpful, generous and patient person, as the very existence of this interview, carried out under such difficult circumstances, will testify.

INTERVIEWER

How did you spend your seventieth birthday?

PERCY

An ordinary day. I went with my wife and some friends to a neighborhood restaurant in New Orleans. I think I had crawfish. What distinguishes Louisianians is that they suck the heads.

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INTERVIEWER

You and your wife recently celebrated your fortieth anniversary. Is it easy, do you imagine, to be married to a writer?

WALKER PERCY

Mine has been a happy marriage—thanks mainly to my wife. Who would want to live with a novelist? A man underfoot in the house all day? A man, moreover, subject to solitary funks and strange elations. If I were a woman, I'd prefer a traveling salesman. There is no secret, or rather the secrets are buried in platitudes. That is to say, it has something to do with love, commitment and family. As to the institution, it is something like Churchill's description of democracy: vicissitudinous yes, but look at the alternatives.

INTERVIEWER

What are the decisive moments, turning points that you regard as the milestones of those seven decades?

PERCY

What comes to mind is something like this: one, losing both parents in my early teens and being adopted by my uncle, a poet, and being exposed to the full force of a remarkable literary imagination; two, contracting a non-fatal case of tuberculosis while serving as an intern in Bellevue Hospital in New York, an event which did not so much change my life as give me leave to change it; three, getting married; four, becoming a Catholic.

INTERVIEWER

If you had the chance, would you decide to be reborn or to flee back into William Blake's "the vales of Har"?

PERCY

No vales of Har, thank you. No rebirth either, but I wouldn't mind a visit in the year 2050—a short visit, not more than half an hour—say, to a park bench at the southeast corner of Central Park in New York, with a portable radio. Just to have a look around, just to see whether we made it and if so,

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in what style. One could tell in half an hour. By "we" of course, I do not mean just Americans, but the species. *Homo sapiens sapiens.*

INTERVIEWER

Once you said that if you were starting over, you might like to make films. Would there be other decisions that would be different?

PERCY

I might study linguistics—not in the current academic meanings of the word, but with a fresh eye, like Newton watching the falling apple: How come? What's going on here?

INTERVIEWER

Apropos of your fascination with film, most of it finds its way into your novels on the thematic level, especially in *The Moviegoer* and *Lancelot.* Does it happen that film or television influence you in less noticeable ways as well, such as cinematic structuring of material and so on?

PERCY

I can only answer in the most general way: that what television and movies give the writer is a new community and a new set of referents. Since nearly everyone watches television a certain number of hours a day (whether they admit it or not), certain turns of plot are ready-made for satirical use, namely the Western shoot-out, one man calling another out, a mythical dance of honor. In my last novel I described one character as looking something like Blake Carrington. Now you may not know who Blake Carrington is—though sooner or later most Hungarians will. A hundred million Americans do know.*

INTERVIEWER

Could you tell me how you feel about your inspiring beliefs, how faithful you have remained to them?

* He is John Forsythe's character in the television series *Dynasty.*

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PERCY

If you mean, am I still a Catholic, the answer is yes. The main difference after thirty-five years is that my belief is less self-conscious, less ideological, less polemical. My ideal is Thomas Moore, an English Catholic—a peculiar breed nowadays—who wore his faith with grace, merriment, and a certain wryness. Incidentally, I reincarnated him again in my new novel and I'm sorry to say he has fallen upon hard times; he is a far cry from the saint, drinks too much, and watches reruns of M*A*S*H on TV.

INTERVIEWER

As for philosophy and religion, do you still regard yourself as a philosophical Catholic existentialist?

PERCY

Philosophical? Existentialist? Religion? Pretty heavy. These are perfectly good words—except perhaps "existentialist"—but over the years they have acquired barnacle-like connotative excrescences. Uttering them induces a certain dreariness and heaviness in the neck muscles. As for "existentialist," I'm not sure it presently has a sufficiently clear referent to be of use. Even "existentialists" forswear the term. It fell into disuse some years ago when certain novelists began saying things like: I beat up my wife in an existential moment—meaning a sudden, irrational impulse.

INTERVIEWER

Is it possible to define your Catholic existentialism in a few sentences?

PERCY

I suppose I would prefer to describe it as a certain view of man, an anthropology, if you like; of man as wayfarer, in a rather conscious contrast to prevailing views of man as organism, as encultured creature, as consumer, Marxist, as subject to such and such a scientific or psychological understanding—all of which he is, but not entirely. It is the "not entirely" I'm

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interested in—like the man Kierkegaard described who read Hegel, understood himself and the universe perfectly by noon but then had the problem of living out the rest of the day. It, my "anthropology," has been expressed better in an earlier, more traditional language—e.g., scriptural: man born to trouble as the sparks fly up; Gabriel Marcel's *Homo viator.*

INTERVIEWER

You converted to Catholicism in the 1940s. What was the motive behind that decision?

PERCY

There are several ways to answer the question. One is theological. The technical theological term is grace, the gratuitous unmerited gift from God. Another answer is less theological: what else is there? Did you expect me to become a Methodist? A Buddhist? A Marxist? A comfortable avuncular humanist like Walter Cronkite? An exhibitionist like Allen Ginsberg? A proper literary-philosophical-existentialist answer is that the occasion was the reading of Kierkegaard's extraordinary essay: "On the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle." Like the readings that mean most to you, what it did was to confirm something I suspected but that it took Sören Kierkegaard to put into words: that what the greatest geniuses in science, literature, art, philosophy utter are sentences which convey truths *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is to say, sentences which can be confirmed by appropriate methods and by anyone, anywhere, any time. But only the apostle can utter sentences which can be accepted on the authority of the apostle, that is, his credentials, sobriety, trustworthiness as a newsbearer. These sentences convey not knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis* but news.

INTERVIEWER

I noticed that you rarely refer to other converted novelists like Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh when discussing your ideas. Or if you do, it is rarely, if ever, in this context.

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PERCY

Maybe it's because novelists don't talk much about each other. Maybe this is because novelists secrete a certain B.O. which only other novelists detect, like certain buzzards who emit a repellent pheromone detectable only by other buzzards, which is to say that only a novelist can know how neurotic, devious, underhanded a novelist can be. Actually I have the greatest admiration for both writers, not necessarily for their religion, but for their consummate craft.

INTERVIEWER

Can we discuss the "losangelized" and re-Christianized New South? Is there anything new in the way the South is developing in the 1980s or in the way you read the South or your own relation to it?

PERCY

The odd thing I've noticed is that while of course the South is more and more indistinguishable from the rest of the country (Atlanta, for example, which has become one of the three or four megalopolises of the U.S., is in fact, I'm told by blacks, their favorite American city) the fact is that as Faulkner said fifty years ago, as soon as you cross the Mason-Dixon Line, you still know it. This, after fifty years of listening to the same radio and watching millions of hours of *Barnaby Jones*. I don't know whether it's the heat or a certain lingering civility but people will slow down on interstates to let you get in traffic. Strangers speak in post offices, hold doors for each other without being thought queer or running a con game or making a sexual advance. I could have killed the last cab driver I had in New York. Ask Eudora Welty, she was in the same cab.

INTERVIEWER

Have your views concerning being a writer in the South undergone a change during the past decades? Is being a writer in the South in 1987 the same as it was when you started to write?

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PERCY

Southern writers—that's the question everybody asks. I still don't know the answer. All I know is that there is still something about living in the South which turns one inward, makes one secretive, sly and scheming, makes one capable of a degree of malice, humor and outrageousness. At any rate, despite the losangelization of the South there are right here, in the New Orleans area, perhaps half a dozen very promising young writers—which is more than can be said of Los Angeles. It comes, not from the famous storytelling gregariousness one hears about, but from the shy, sly young woman, say, who watches, listens, gets a fill of it and slips off to do a number on it. And it comes, not from having arrived at last in the Great American Mainstream along with the likes of Emerson and Sandburg, but from being close enough to have a good look at one's fellow Americans, fellow Southerners, yet keep a certain wary distance, enough to nourish a secret, subversive conviction: I can do a number on those guys—and on me—and it will be good for all of us.

INTERVIEWER

Apropos of Southern writing, does regionalism still apply?

PERCY

Sure, in the better sense of the word, in the sense that Chekhov and Flaubert and Mark Twain are regionalists—not in the sense that Joel Chandler Harris and Bret Harte were regionalists.

INTERVIEWER

You studied science at Chapel Hill and became a medical doctor at Columbia. In your recently published essay "The Diagnostic Novel" you suggest that serious art is "just as cognitive" as science is and "the serious novelist is quite as much concerned with discovering reality as a serious physicist." Art explores reality in a way which "cannot be done any other way." What are some of the ways that are specific to artistic as opposed to scientific exploration of reality?

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PERCY

The most commonplace example of the cognitive dimension in fiction is the reader's recognition—sometimes the shock of recognition—the "verification" of a sector of reality which he had known but not known that he had known. I think of letters I get from readers which may refer to a certain scene and say, in effect, yes! that's the way it is! For example, Binx in *The Moviegoer* describes one moviegoing experience, going to see "Panic in the Streets," a film shot in New Orleans, going to a movie theater in the very neighborhood where the same scenes in the movie were filmed. Binx tells his girlfriend Kate about his reasons for enjoying the film—that it, the film, "certifies" the reality of the neighborhood in a peculiar sense in which the direct experience of the neighborhood, living in the neighborhood, does not. I have heard from many readers about this and other such scenes—as have other novelists, I'm sure—saying they *know* exactly what Binx is talking about. I think it is reasonable to call such a transaction cognitive, sciencing. This sort of sciencing is closely related to the cognitive dimension of psychoanalysis. The patient, let's say, relates a dream. Such and such happened. The analyst suggests that perhaps the dream "means" such and such. It sometimes happens that the patient—perhaps after a pause, a frown, a shaking of head—will suddenly "see" it. Yes, by God! Which is to say: in sciencing, there are forms of verification other than pointer-readings.

INTERVIEWER

As for your view that it is a mistake to draw a moral and be edifying in art—is Lancelot's naive-fascistoid idea of the Third Revolution illustrative of this?

PERCY

I was speaking of the everyday use of the words "moral" and "edifying"—which is to say, preachy—in the sense that, say, Ayn Rand's novels are preachy, have a message, but may in the deepest sense of the word be immoral. So is Lancelot's "Third Revolution" in the deepest sense immoral and, I hope, is so

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taken by the reader. To tell the truth, I don't see how any serious fiction-writer or poet can fail to be moral and edifying in the technical non-connotative sense of these words, since he or she cannot fail to be informed by his own deep sense of the way things should be or should not be, by a sense of pathology and hence a sense of health. If a writer writes from a sense of outrage—and most serious writers do—isn't he by definition a moral writer?

INTERVIEWER

The influence of Dostoyevsky, Camus, Sartre and other novelists upon you has often been discussed. Is there any literary influence that joined the rest recently?

PERCY

Chekhov reread—in a little reading group we have here in Covington. His stories "In the Ravine" and "Ward Six" are simply breathtaking. Also recently, the German novelist Peter Handke whose latest, *The Weight of the World*, is somehow exhilarating in the spontaneity of its free-form diary entries. The accurate depiction of despair can be exhilarating, a cognitive emotion.

INTERVIEWER

What is your attitude towards the reader?

PERCY

I hold out for some sort of contractual relationship between novelist and reader, however flawed, misapprehended or fragmentary. Perhaps the contract is ultimately narratological, perhaps not. But something keeps—or fails to keep—the reader reading the next sentence. Even the "antinovel" presupposes some sort of contractual venture at the very moment the "antinovelist" is attacking narrativity. Such a venture implies that the writer is up to something, going abroad like Don Quixote—if only to attack windmills—and that the reader is with him. Otherwise why would the latter bother? The antinovelist is like a Protestant. His protests might be valid, but

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where would he be without the Catholic Church? I have no objection to "anti-story" novels. What I object to is any excursion by the author which violates the novelistic contract between writer and reader which I take to be an intersubjective transaction entailing the transmission of a set of symbols, a text. The writer violates the contract when he trashes the reader by pornography or scatological political assaults, e.g., depicting President Nixon in a novel buggering Ethel Rosenberg in Times Square, or LBJ plotting the assassination of JFK. Take pornography, a difficult, slippery case. It is not necessary to get into a discussion of First Amendment rights—for all I know it has them. And for all I know, pornography has its uses. All I suggest is that pornography and literature stimulate different organs. If we can agree that a literary text is a set of signals transmitted from sender to receiver in a certain code, pornography is a different set of signals and a different code.

INTERVIEWER

Can it be said that in your case the primary business of literature and art is cognitive whereas with John Gardner it is "to be morally judgmental"? It is clear that you and Gardner are not talking about the same thing.

PERCY

I expect there is an overlap between Gardner's "moral fiction" and my "diagnostic novel." But Gardner makes me nervous with his moralizing. When he talks about literature "establishing models of human action," he seems to be using literature to influence what people do. I think he is confusing two different orders of reality. Aquinas and the Schoolmen were probably right: art is making, morality is doing. Art is a virtue of the practical intellect, which is to say making something. This is not to say that art, fiction, is not moral in the most radical sense—if it is made right. But if you write a novel with the goal of trying to make somebody do right, you're writing a tract—which may be an admirable enterprise but it is not literature. Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* is in my opinion a work of art, but it would probably not pass

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Gardner's moral test. Come to think of it, I think my reflexes are medical rather than moral. This comes, I guess, from having been a pathologist. Now I am perfectly willing to believe Flannery O'Connor when she said, and she wasn't kidding, that the modern world is a territory largely occupied by the devil. No one doubts the malevolence abroad in the world. But the world is also deranged. What interests me as a novelist is not the malevolence of man—so what else is new?—but his looniness. The looniness, that is to say, of the "normal" denizen of the Western world who, I think it fair to say, doesn't know who he is, what he believes, or what he is doing. This unprecedented state of affairs is, I suggest, the domain of the "diagnostic" novelist.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any trends or authors in contemporary American innovative fiction that you regard with sympathy?

PERCY

Yes, there are quite a few younger writers whom I will not name but whom I would characterize as innovative "minimalist" writers who have been influenced by Donald Barthelme without succumbing to him, which is easy to do, or as young Southern writers who have been influenced by Faulkner and Welty without succumbing to them, which is also easy to do.

INTERVIEWER

If I were asked whose work I feel to be closest to yours—the whole terrain of contemporary American fiction considered—I would choose Saul Bellow.

PERCY

Why?

INTERVIEWER

Because of the philosophical bent, because both of you are satirical moralists, because Bellow's is also a quest informed by an awareness that man *can* do something about alienation,

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and because philosophical abstraction and concrete social commentary are equally balanced.

PERCY

I take that kindly. I admire Barth, Pynchon, Heller, Vonnegut—you could also throw in Updike, Cheever and Malamud—but perhaps Bellow most of all. He bears the same relationship to the streets of Chicago and upper Broadway—has inserted himself into them—the way I have in the Gentilly district of New Orleans or a country town in West Feliciana Parish in Louisiana.

INTERVIEWER

What exactly moves you to write? An idea? An image? A character? A landscape? A memory? Something that happened to you or to someone else? You have said about *The Moviegoer* that you "liked the idea of putting a young man down in a faceless suburb."

PERCY

The spark might have come from Sartre's Roquentin in *Nausea* sitting in that library watching the Self-Taught Man or sitting in that cafe watching the waiter. Why not have a younger, less perverse Roquentin, a Southerner of a certain sort, and put him down in a movie house in Gentilly, a middle-class district of New Orleans, not unlike Sartre's Bouville.

INTERVIEWER

If every writer writes from his own predicament, could you give a few hints as to how *The Moviegoer* illustrates this point?

PERCY

After the war, not doing medicine, writing and publishing articles in psychiatric, philosophical and political journals, I was living in New Orleans and going to the movies. You can't make a living writing articles for *The Journal of Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. The thought crossed my mind: why not do what French philosophers often do and

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Americans almost never—novelize philosophy, incarnate ideas in a person and a place, which latter is after all a noble Southern tradition in fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Did you model any characters on your brothers, wife, children, grandchildren?

PERCY

Not in any way anyone would recognize.

INTERVIEWER

In connection with *Message in the Bottle*, a collection of essays that had been published over two-and-a-half decades, what attracted you to linguistics and semiotics, to the theories of language, meaning, signs, and symbols?

PERCY

That's a big question, too big to answer in more than a couple of sentences. It has to do with the first piece of writing I ever got published. I was sitting around Saranac Lake getting over a light case of tuberculosis. There was nothing to do but read. I got hold of Susanne Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key* in which she focuses on man's unique symbol-mongering behavior. This was an eye-opener to me, a good physician-scientist brought up in the respectable behaviorist tradition of U.N.C. and Columbia. I was so excited, I wrote a review and sent it to *Thought* quarterly. It was accepted! I was paid by twenty-five reprints. That was enough. What was important was seeing my scribble in *print*!

INTERVIEWER

Can you recollect what was involved in your getting started with *The Last Gentleman*?

PERCY

I wanted to create someone not quite as flat as Binx in *The Moviegoer*, more disturbed, more passionate, more in love and,

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above all, *on the move*. He is in pilgrimage without quite knowing it—doing a Kierkegaardian repetition, that is, going back to his past to find himself, then from home and self to the *West* following the summons of a queer sort of apostle, mad Doctor Sutter. "Going West" is U.S. colloquial for dying.

INTERVIEWER

Love in the Ruins?

PERCY

Love in the Ruins was a picnic, with everything in it but the kitchen sink. It was written during the Time of Troubles in the sixties, with all manner of polarization in the country, black vs. white, North vs. South, hippie vs. square, liberal vs. conservative, McCarthyism vs. commies, etc.—the whole seasoned with a Southern flavor and featuring sci-fi, futurism and Dr. More, a whimsical descendent of the saint. After the solemnities of *The Moviegoer* and *The Last Gentleman*, why not enjoy myself? I did. Now I have seen fit to resurrect Dr. More in the novel I just finished, *The Thanatos Syndrome*. He is in trouble as usual and I am enjoying it.

INTERVIEWER

Lancelot?

PERCY

Lancelot might have come from an upside-down theological notion, not about God but about sin, more specifically the falling into disrepute of the word "sin." So it seemed entirely fitting that Lancelot, a proper Southern gent raised in a long tradition of knightly virtues, chiefly by way of Walter Scott, the most widely read novelist in the South for a hundred years, should have undertaken his own sort of quest for his own peculiar Grail, i.e., sin, which quest is after all a sort of search for God. Lancelot wouldn't be caught dead looking for God but he is endlessly intrigued by the search for evil. Is there such a thing—malevolence over and beyond psychological and sociological categories? The miscarriage of his search issues,

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quite logically I think, in his own peculiar brand of fascism, which is far more attractive and seductive, I think, than Huey Long's.

INTERVIEWER

Let me ask about *The Second Coming*, too, since although it developed into a sequel to *The Last Gentleman*, originally it was not conceived as a sequel.

PERCY

The Second Coming was a sure-enough love story—a genre I would ordinarily steer clear of. What made it possible was the, to me, appealing notion of the encounter of Allie and Will, like the crossing of two lines on a graph, one going up, the other down: the man who has "succeeded" in life, made it, has the best of worlds, and yet falls down in sand traps on the golf course, gazes at clouds and is haunted by memory, is in fact in despair; the girl, a total "failure," a schizophrenic who has flunked life, as she puts it, yet who despite all sees the world afresh and full of hope. It was the paradox of it that interested me. What happens when he meets her? What is the effect on his ghostlike consciousness of her strange, yet prescient, schizophrenic speech?

INTERVIEWER

Nonfiction. *Lost in the Cosmos*?

PERCY

Lost in the Cosmos was a sly, perhaps even devious, attempt to approach a semiotic of the self. Circumspection was necessary here, because semioticists have no use for the self, and votaries of the self—poets, humanists, novel-readers etc.—have no use for semiotics. It was a quite ambitious attempt actually, not necessarily successful, to derive the self, a very nebulous entity indeed, through semiotics, specifically the emergence of self as a consequence of the child's entry into the symbol-mongering world of men—and even more specifically, through the acquisition of language. What was underhanded

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about the book was the insertion of a forty-page "primer of semiotics" in the middle of the book with a note of reassurance to the reader that he could skip it if he wanted to. Of course I was hoping he, or more likely she, would be sufficiently intrigued to take the dare and read it, since it is of course the keystone of the book. Having derived the self semiotically, then the fun came from deriving the various options of the self semiotically—the various "re-entries" of the self from the orbits most people find themselves in. Such options are ordinarily regarded as the territory of the novelist, the queer things his characters do. The fun was like the fun of Mendeleyev who devised his periodic table of elements and then looked to see if all the elements were there. Technically speaking, it was a modest attempt to give the "existentialia" of Heidegger some semiotic grounding—this, of course, in the ancient tradition of Anglo-Saxon empiricism administering therapy to the European tendency to neurotic introspection. It was also fun to administer a dose of semiotics to Phil Donahue and Carl Sagan, splendid fellows both, but who's perfect?

INTERVIEWER

Which of your novels do you expect to weather time best and why?

PERCY

I've no idea.

INTERVIEWER

Would you rewrite any of your works from any aspect at any point if you could?

PERCY

No, I hardly think about them. Sometimes in the middle of the night, however, something will occur to me which I would use in a revision. For example, in the chapter called "Metaphor as Mistake" in *The Message in the Bottle* I wish I had used this example. In Charity Hospital in New Orleans, which serves mainly poor blacks, the surgical condition,

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fibroids of the uterus, an accurate if somewhat prosaic definition, is known to many patients more creatively as "fireballs of the Eucharist."

INTERVIEWER

Is it correct to say that your *oeuvre* forms an organic whole and that there is a consistent logic that takes you from one work to the next as you explore reality step by step?

PERCY

Yes, I hope so—though the organic quality, if there is any, occurred more by happenstance than by design. The "fruits of the search" are there—to the extent they are allowed in the modest enterprise of the novel. That is to say, the novelist has no business setting up as the Answer Man. Or, as Binx says in the epilogue of *The Moviegoer*:

> "As for my search, I have not the inclination to say much on the subject. For one thing, I have not the authority, as the great Danish philosopher declared, to speak of such matters . . ."

But the novelist is entitled to a degree of artifice and cunning, as Joyce said; or the "indirect method," as Kierkegaard said; or the comic-bizarre for shock therapy, as Flannery O'Connor did. For example, a hint of the resolution of Binx's search is given in a single four-word sentence on page 240.* The reader should know by now that Binx, for all his faults, never bullshits, especially not with children. In *Lancelot* the resolution of the conflict between Lancelot and Percival is given by a single word, the last word in the book. Which holds out hope for Lancelot.

INTERVIEWER

Hope in what sense? Isn't he beyond reach for Percival anyway?

* "He'll be like you."

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PERCY

No, Lancelot is not beyond the reach of Percival and accordingly Lancelot is not beyond hope. The entire novel is Lancelot's spiel to Percival. Percival does not *in the novel* reply in kind. At the end Lancelot asks him if he has anything to say. Percival merely says, "yes." Lancelot, presumably, will listen. It is precisely my perception of the esthetic limitations of the novel-form that this is all Percival can say. But the novelist is allowed to nourish the secret hope that the reader may remember that in the legend it was only Percival and Lancelot, of all the knights, who saw the Grail.

INTERVIEWER

I guess *Lancelot* was meant as your bicentenary novel. But the two radical points of view, Lancelot's "pagan Greco-Roman Nazi and so on tradition" and Percival's orthodox Christianity, are unacceptable for most people, as you once explained. So, another guess, what you could teach America in *Lancelot* was what was wrong, and what you could work out in *The Second Coming* was what you could *recommend* to the nation.

PERCY

If you say so, though I had nothing so grand in mind as "recommending to the nation." I never lose sight of the lowly vocation of the novelist. He is mainly out to give pleasure to a reader—one would hope, esthetic pleasure. He operates in the esthetic sphere, not the religious or even the ethical. That is to say, he is in the business, like all other artists, of making, not doing, certainly not lecturing to the nation. He hopes to make well and so sell what he makes.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't it safe to say, though, that *Lancelot* and *The Second Coming* are twin novels in the sense that while Lance embarks on a quest to meet the devil, Barrett's quest is to meet God? The latter's physical journey downwards seems to be an ironic counterpoint to his yearning, which is upward. Barrett's route leads him—through his fall into the greenhouse—to a differ-

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ent reality: perhaps the correction of direction you recommend to the South and to America. Is this stretching things too far?

PERCY

Yes indeed. Will Barrett falls out of the cave into Allie's arms, i.e., out of his nutty gnostic quest into sacramental reality. I liked the idea of falling out of a cave. I permitted myself a veiled optimism here, that one can in fact fall out of a cave, i.e., despair and depression, when aware of themselves as such, can be closest to life. From cave to greenhouse, courtesy of Sören Kierkegaard and Dr. Jung. Same reservation, however, about "a message to the South." The South is by and large in no mood for messages from Walker Percy, being, for one thing, too busy watching "Dallas," "Love Boat" and the NFL on the tube. Or Jimmy Swaggart.

INTERVIEWER

Do the times have anything to do with your reaching this breakthrough to eros, affirmation and celebration in 1980 and not before? In other words, could *The Second Coming* have been written in the fifties or sixties? Or was your own age and life experience needed to reach this stage?

PERCY

Yes, no, yes. Also artistic development. Also luck—as I said before. You're sitting at your typewriter, nine in the morning, a bad time, or four in the afternoon, a worse time. Sunk as usual. In the cave. What's going to happen to these poor people? They're on their own. I'll be damned if I'm going to impose a solution on them, a chic unhappy existential ending or an upbeat Fannie Hurst ending. What does this poor guy do? He falls out of the cave, what else?

INTERVIEWER

Can we look at much of what goes on in innovative fiction, when it is not self-indulgent and cynical, in light of what you call "defamiliarization" in *Lost in the Cosmos*? That is, the art-

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ist tries to "wrench signifier out of context and exhibit it in all its queerness and splendor"?

PERCY

Absolutely, but I would apply the principle even more broadly, indeed to much that is beautiful in poetry. Take Shakespeare's lovely lines: "Daffodils that come before the swallow dares/And take the winds of March with beauty." Surely the wrenching out of context and hence defamiliarization of such ordinary words as *daffodils, swallow, dare, March* and even the curious use of *take*, has something to do with the beauty. Obviously Empson's theory of ambiguity in poetry is closely akin.

INTERVIEWER

It is clear that once we are dealing with a "post-religious technological society," transcendence is possible for the self by science or art but not by religion. Where does this leave the heroes of your novels with their metaphysical yearnings—Binx, Barrett, More, Lance?

PERCY

I would have to question your premise, i.e., the death of religion. The word itself, *religion*, is all but moribund, true, smelling of dust and wax—though of course in its denotative sense it is accurate enough. I have referred to the age as "post-Christian" but it does not follow from this that there are not Christians or that they are wrong. Possibly the age is wrong. Catholics—who are the only Christians I can speak for—still believe that God entered history as a man, founded a church and will come again. This is not the best of times for the Catholic Church, but it has seen and survived worse. I see the religious "transcendence" you speak of as curiously paradoxical. Thus it is only by a movement, "transcendence," toward God that these characters, Binx *et al.*, become themselves, not abstracted like scientists but fully incarnate beings in the world. Kierkegaard put it more succinctly: the self only becomes itself when it becomes itself transparently before God.

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INTERVIEWER

The second half of the question still applies: is it possible to describe Binx and the others in terms of your semiotic typology of the self?

PERCY

I would think in terms of the semiotic typology of self described in *The Message in the Bottle*. The semiotic receptor or "self" described here is perceived as being—unlike the "responding organism" of Skinner or Morris or Ogden-and-Richards—attuned to the reception of *sentences*, asserted subject-predicate pairings, namings, etc. There is adumbrated here a classification of sentences—not grammatically but existentially, that is, how the semiotic self construes the sentences in relation to his "world" (*Welt* not *Umwelt*), the latter itself a semiotic construction. Thus:

I. Sentences conveying "island news": there is fresh water in the next cove; the price of eggs is fifty cents a dozen; Nicaragua has invaded El Salvador; my head hurts; etc.

II. Sentences conveying truths *sub specie aeternitatis* (i.e., valid on any island anywhere): 2 plus 2 equals 4; $E=MC^2$ (mathematical sentences); to thine own self be true, etc. (poetic sentences); wolves are carnivorous (scientific sentences, true of all known wolves anywhere).

III. Sentences announcing news from across the seas: The French fleet is on its way to Saint Helena to rescue you (a sentence of possible significance to Napoleon). Or: A certain event occurred in history, in the Middle East some two thousand years ago, which is of utmost importance to every living human. Presumably it was just some such sentence, however indirectly, obscurely, distortedly uttered, which might have been uttered or was about to be uttered to Binx Bolling, Will Barrett, at the end of these novels—by such unlikely souls as Sutter. Notice too that it is only this last sort of sentence, the good news from across the seas, which requires the credential of the newsbearer. Or, as Kierkegaard phrased the sentence: Only I, an apostle (that is, messenger), have the authority to bring you this piece of news. It is true and I make you eternally

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responsible for whether or not you believe it. Certainly it is not the business of the novelist to utter sentences of Class III, but only a certain sort of Class II sentence. Also, *mutatis mutandis*, it is Dr. Thomas More who, in *The Thanatos Syndrome*, hears the Class III sentence as a non-sentence, devalued, ossified, not so much nonsense as part merely of a religious decor, like the whiff of incense or a plastic Jesus on the dashboard, or a bumper sticker common here in Louisiana: Jesus Saves.

INTERVIEWER

Is it possible that the idea central to your semiotic theory of the self—namely, that the self has no sign of itself—has something to do with Jung's idea in his *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* where he speaks about the difficulty man has expressing the inexpressible in his language?

PERCY

Actually I would suppose that my notions about the "semiotic origins" of the self are more closely related, at least in my own mind, to the existentialist philosophers, Heidegger and Marcel and Jaspers, and to the existentialist school of psychiatrists. Some years ago I published a paper which sought to do precisely that: derive many of the so-called "existentialia"—anxiety, notion of a "world"—from this very structure of man's peculiar triadic relation to his environment: interpreter-symbol-referent.

INTERVIEWER

The Jungian idea in *The Thanatos Syndrome* is mentioned in the book—that anxiety and depression might be trying to tell the patient something he does not understand. Doesn't this contradict the "semiotic-predicament-of-the-self" theory in *Cosmos*, i.e., its unspeakableness in a world of signs?

PERCY

I don't think so. The concept of an unsignified self stranded in a world of solid signs (trees, apples, Alabama, Ralphs,

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Zoltáns) is very useful in thinking about the various psychiatric ways patients "fall" into inauthenticity, the way frantic selves grope for any mask at hand to disguise their nakedness. Sartre's various descriptions of bad faith in role-playing are marvellous phenomenological renderings of this quest of the self for some, any, kind of habiliment. This being the case, perhaps the patient's "symptoms"—anxiety, depression and whatnot—may be read as a sort of warning or summons of the self to itself, of the "authentic" self to the "fallen" or inauthentic self. Heidegger speaks of the "fall" of the self into the "world." I am thinking of the first character you encounter in *The Thanatos Syndrome* through the eyes of Dr. More: the woman who lives at the country club and thinks she has everything and yet is in the middle of a panic attack. She is also the last person you encounter in the book—after being "relieved" of her symptoms by the strange goings-on in the book. So here she is at the end confronting her anxiety. She is about to listen to herself tell herself something. The last sentence in the novel is: She opens her mouth to speak. Jung, of course, would have understood this patient as this or that element of the self speaking to itself, perhaps anima-self to animus-self. Perhaps he is right, but I find it more congenial and less occult to speak in terms of observables and semiotic elements. Perhaps it is the Anglo-Saxon empiricist in me.

INTERVIEWER

One way to sum up *The Thanatos Syndrome*—without giving away the plot—is to call it an ecological novel. What made you turn to the ecological theme?

PERCY

I wasn't particularly aware of the ecological theme. It is true that the Louisiana of the novel is an ecological mess—as indeed it is now—but this I took to be significant only in so far as it shows the peculiar indifference of the strange new breed of Louisianians in the novel. After all, chimp-like creatures do not generally form environmental-protection societies.

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INTERVIEWER

Novels like Cheever's *Oh! What a Paradise It Seems*, Gardner's *Mickelsson's Ghosts* and Don DeLillo's *White Noise* are about the contamination of the environment. Were you influenced by those novels or by any others with similar topics?

PERCY

Not really. If you want to locate a contemporary influence, it would be something like a cross between Bellow and Vonnegut—aiming at Bellow's depth in his central characters and Vonnegut's outrageousness and satirical use of sci-fi.

INTERVIEWER

Did you make up the "pre-frontal cortical deficit," the Tauber test and other things, the way you invented Hausmann's Syndrome for inappropriate longing in *The Second Coming*?

PERCY

No, they're not made up. There is just enough present-day evidence to make my "syndrome" plausible, or at least credible. One advantage of futuristic novel-writing is that it relieves one of restriction to the current state of the art of brain function. Another way of saying this is that, fortunately, the present knowledge of cortical function is so primitive that it gives the novelist considerable carte blanche.

INTERVIEWER

What about in *The Thanatos Syndrome*—is the pharmacological effect of Na^{24} on the cortex known?

PERCY

Not that I know of, but perhaps some shrink will write me, as one did about Hausmann's Syndrome, and report that, sure enough, administration of Na^{24} to patients in the Veteran's Hospital in Seattle has been shown to reduce anxiety and improve sexual performance both in quantity and quality and variety (for example, presenting rearward).

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INTERVIEWER

What led you to the idea of cortex manipulation?

PERCY

Well of course the cortex is the neurological seat of the primate's, and man's, "higher functions." But I was particularly intrigued by the work of neurologists like John Eccles who locate the "self" in the language areas of the cortex—which squares very well with the semiotic origins of the self in the origins of language—as that which gives names, utters sentences. It seems, despite the most intensive training, chimps do neither.

INTERVIEWER

The idea of man regressing to a pre-lingual stage must be a satiric device to get at what you experience in human communicative behavior today?

PERCY

Well, I might have had at the edge of my mind some literary critics, philosophers and semioticians, who seem hell-bent on denying the very qualities of language and literature which have been held in such high esteem in the past: namely, that it is possible to know something about the world, that the world actually exists, that one person can actually say or write about the world and that other people can understand him. That, in a word, communication is possible. Some poets and critics outdo me in regression. I was content to regress some characters to a rather endearing pongid-primate level. But one poet I read about claimed that the poet's truest self could only be arrived at if he regressed himself clear back to the inorganic level, namely, a stone.

INTERVIEWER

When at the end of the book you hint that earlier poets wrote two-word sentences, uttered howls or routinely exposed themselves during their readings, I thought you meant the counterculture.

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PERCY

I was thinking of Ginsberg and company— and some of his imitators who can be found in our genteel Southern universities. I do not imply that Ginsberg had been intoxicated by Na^{24}, but only that such poets might suffer cortical deficits of a more obscure sort. The fact that American writers-in-residence and poets-in-residence often behave worse than football players does not necessarily imply that they are more stoned than the latter. There is more than one way to assault the cortex.

INTERVIEWER

You have said literature can be a living social force, that the segregationists could feel the impact of a satirical line about Valley Forge Academy in *Love in the Ruins*. Do you expect *The Thanatos Syndrome* to be effective in that way?

PERCY

I would hope that it would have some small influence in the great debate on the sanctity of life in the face of technology. For one thing, I would hope to raise the level of the debate above the crude polemics of the current pro-abortion/pro-life wrangle. When people and issues get completely polarized, somebody needs to take a step back, take a deep breath, take a new look.

INTERVIEWER

Aren't there more immediate ways besides writing satirical fiction? Have you ever been engaged in political activity?

PERCY

Only in a small way in the sixties. For a while I had the honor of being labeled a nigger-lover and a bleeding heart. One small bomb threat from the Klan and one interesting night in the attic with my family and a shotgun, feeling both pleased and ridiculous and beset with ambiguities—for I knew some of the Klan people and they are not bad fellows, no worse probably than bleeding-heart liberals.

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INTERVIEWER

Is there any concrete issue that engages your attention most in connection with what is going on in America at the moment?

PERCY

Probably the fear of seeing America, with all its great strength and beauty and freedom—"Now in these dread latter days of the old violent beloved U.S.A.," and so on—gradually subside into decay through default and be defeated, not by the Communist movement, demonstrably a bankrupt system, but from within by weariness, boredom, cynicism, greed and in the end helplessness before its great problems. Probably the greatest is the rise of a black underclass. Maybe Faulkner was right. Slavery was America's Original Sin and the one thing that can defeat us. I trust not.

INTERVIEWER

In connection with what is going on in the world?

PERCY

Ditto: the West losing by spiritual acedia. A Judaic view is not inappropriate here: Communism may be God's punishment for the sins of the West. Dostoyevsky thought so.

INTERVIEWER

You have often spoken about the postpartum depression you are in when you finish a novel. To put the question in Lost-in-the-Cosmos terms: now that you have finished another novel, which re-entry option is open to you?

PERCY

Thanks for taking re-entries seriously. Probably re-entry (3)—travel (geographical—I'm going to Maine where I've never been). Plus re-entry (2), anaesthesia—a slight dose of bourbon.

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INTERVIEWER

In 1981 you spoke about a novel you were writing about two amnesiacs traveling on a Greyhound bus. You also said that you had been at that novel for two years. *Thanatos* is obviously not that novel. Did you give up on that one?

PERCY

I can't remember.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any plans for future works?

PERCY

It is in my mind to write a short work on semiotics showing how the current discipline has been screwed up by followers of Charles Peirce and de Saussure, the founders of modern semiotics. The extraordinary insight of Peirce into the *triadic* nature of meaning for humans and of de Saussure into the nature of the sign—as a union of the signifier and the signified—has been largely perverted by the current European tradition of structuralism and deconstruction and the American version of "dyadic" psychology, that is, various versions of behaviorism, so-called "cognitive" psychology, artificial intelligence, and so on. It would be nice if someone pursued Peirce's and de Saussure's breakthroughs. On the other hand, I may not have the time or the energy.

INTERVIEWER

Are there hopes that you would like the eighth decade of your life to fulfill?

PERCY

I was thinking of getting a word processor.

INTERVIEWER

The minimum a seventy-year-old man deserves is a birthday

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present. Since the person in question happens to be a writer, and since he has shown in a self-interview that he is the best man to answer the questions, the birthday present is that he can *ask* the last question.

PERCY

Question: Since you are a satirical novelist and since the main source of the satirist's energy is anger about something amiss or wrong about the world, what is the main target of your anger in *The Thanatos Syndrome*?

Answer: It is the widespread and ongoing devaluation of human life in the western world—under various sentimental disguises: "quality of life," "pointless suffering," "termination of life without meaning," etc. I trace it to a certain mind-set in the biological and social sciences which is extraordinarily influential among educated folk—so much so that it has almost achieved the status of a quasi-religious orthodoxy. If I had to give it a name, it would be something like: The Holy Office of the Secular Inquisition. It is not to be confused with "secular humanism" because, for one thing, it is anti-human. Although it drapes itself in the mantle of the scientific method and free scientific inquiry, it is neither free nor scientific. Indeed it relies on certain hidden dogma where dogma has no place. I can think of two holy commandments which the Secular Inquisition lays down for all scientists and believers. The first: In your investigations and theories, Thou shalt not find anything unique about the human animal even if the evidence points to such uniqueness. Example: Despite heroic attempts to teach sign language to other animals, the evidence is that even the cleverest chimpanzee has never spontaneously named a single object or uttered a single sentence. Yet dogma requires that, despite traditional belief in the soul or the mind, and the work of more recent workers like Peirce and Langer in man's unique symbolizing capacity, *Homo sapiens sapiens* be declared to be not qualitatively different from other animals. Another dogma: Thou shalt not suggest that there is a unique and fatal flaw in *Homo sapiens sapiens* or indeed any perverse trait that cannot be laid to the influence of Western civiliza-

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tion. Examples: (1) An entire generation came under the influence of Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* and its message: that the Samoans were an innocent, happy and Edenic people until they were corrupted by missionaries and technology. That this turned out not to be true, that indeed the Samoans appear to have been at least as neurotic as New Yorkers, has not changed the myth or the mind-set. (2) The gentle Tasaday people of the Philippines, an isolated Stone Age tribe, were also described as innocents, peace-loving and benevolent. When asked to describe evil, they replied: "We cannot think of anything that is not good." That the Tasaday story has turned out to be a hoax is like an *erratum* corrected in a footnote and as inconsequential. (3) The ancient Mayans are still perceived as not only the builders of a high culture, practitioners of the arts and sciences, but a gentle folk—this despite the fact that recent deciphering of Mayan hieroglyphs have disclosed the Mayans to have been a cruel, warlike people capable of tortures even more vicious than the Aztecs. Scholars, after ignoring the findings, have admitted that the "new image" of the Mayans is perhaps "less romantic" than we had supposed. Conclusion: It is easy to criticize the absurdities of fundamentalist beliefs like "scientific creationism"—that the world and its creatures were created six thousand years ago. But it is also necessary to criticize other dogmas parading as science and the bad faith of some scientists who have their own dogmatic agendas to promote under the guise of "free scientific inquiry." Scientific inquiry should in fact be free. The warning: If it is not, if it is subject to this or that ideology, then do not be surprised if the history of the Weimar doctors is repeated. Weimar leads to Auschwitz. The nihilism of some scientists in the name of ideology or sentimentality and the consequent devaluation of individual human life leads straight to the gas chamber.

—**Zoltán Abádi-Nagy**

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Alan Williamson

The Muse of Distance

What composes a life? Mine comes, too much, from
books;
but also the sense that, if you climbed high places,

you would see the streets go on with nothing to end them,
and be driven to, perhaps even desire,

whatever they withheld: a flight of smokestacks past water;
a girl in a mean, dawn-blue room; a glimpse of the
terrible

engines, or giants, it took to make such a world . . .

*

Far in the caverns of our night, a jarring:
then chinks of light

at both doors to my room, and sausage-smells from our
huge
travellers' breakfast; then lugging the suitcases, down

from the hiding-places where they'd kept all winter—
tribal ochre: the trademark an Indian's head

off an old penny—down the long stairwell, black
rail, white balusters, to the mirroring black-

and-white tile at the foot, not scarily dim now, but bathed
through the jewel-facetted panes

of the entrance hall beyond, in silveriness
without origin or ray . . . So our years came round, as far
back

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as I can remember, to this ritual of detaching
ourselves from ourselves westward:

our summer in California; half the continent's
breadth; a journey reliving

my father's childhood, failure by fresh start, westward;
which was, perhaps, why his nerves flared to get away

at seven, on schedule, so that he lashed out at
my mother or me, some wrong way I packed the trunk

or failed to make it lock—"If you grew up
the way most people do, that's what your precious

intelligence would be judged by!"—betraying not only
me, but his whole life there, with the quiet,

the high-ranged books . . . And yet the happiness,
the *Nunc Dimittis*, when we set our course down

the east-west numbered streets, half-fused with the sun
risen
from the lake behind us, touching with unwitnessing
strangeness

—as, back in the apartment, I had touched
the dinosaur bones on my dresser, knowing nothing

would change their position or how the light would pass
them
all the days till fall—the dewy Gothic mirage

of the University; the Negro blocks; the airport's
prairie-tan lanes . . .

When we passed the garbage dump, my father marvelled
in hoots and youks, and held his nose, as if everything

he hated in his life were exposed, concentrated,
rotted and burned at once. For the next half hour—

the country coming on, meadowlarks starting
from the wet ditchgrass, but the great heat rising

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more unimpeded than ever in the city—
he sang:

You were my girl in cal-i-co,
I was your bashful barefoot beau,
I wrote on your slate, I love you so,
When we were— a couple— of kids!

*

My Great-Uncle George hopped the train where it slowed
for the curve near the family farm
eight miles out of Galesburg. He'd done it often,
but this January night couldn't awaken
conductor or passengers. I can imagine
the corridor through the window, lucid, empty,
and how he managed, in the gathering speed, to unbuckle
and reloop his belt around some grip.

They found his
frozen body still hanging there in the gaslight
of the Chicago yards.

I imagine my father
was named for him, whether before or after
I've no idea. In any case, they moved West
so early and repeatedly, the death
could only have followed like a kind of legend
or coat-of-arms.

Often, crossing the Midwest,
on the new bypass skirting some blind place-name,
my father would say, "I went to high school here,"
or "we had a farm," and then "only my poor father
would have bought such land. I suppose they bailed him
out. They always did."

We never stopped to visit
those family places, though once we were turned away
at the Brown Palace dining room in Denver, because

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I had no tie on. (I was fourteen.)
"Take a look anyway," my father said shyly,
and nudged me past a door—the wrought-iron well
above the lobby, leather sofas: "That's where
I sat and held the gold brick!"

—a real one; for twenty minutes; while Uncle Alvin
went upstairs and made his calls.

Next morning we drove out an indeterminate, elm-lined
boulevard
to a lavender-Gothic house. When I got out
to take a picture, he said I was "making a spectacle";
and then, as we pulled away, "it must have been here
that I had the t.b. That bilious attic room."

And I said, "It *must*? But Daddy, don't you know?"

Then off again: but that night I wondered
just what he was revisiting when, as often,
he groaned himself to sleep.

(Though my mother once
returned from the thin-walled motel bathroom, her voice
a mixture of panic and triumph—"They were saying,
'do you think there's something wrong
with that man in there?'"
—it was not an
unmusical sound: long, falling, half a sigh,
like wind in the wires, or a train distancing.)

*

But what I remember best are the anonymous towns
whose Main Streets we walked at twilight, drugged
with the slow lift of six-hundred-mile days
—not even stared at: as though our speed were written
like a protective mark, across our brows—
in those Main Streets still smelling of grass, or the desert's
sharpness . . .

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It was the things that wrenched at me the most
in those places: a dead firm's name still silver-dollared
in the cool pavement between new display windows;
and all the tools, that lived and toughened and rusted
with
men's hands—the unsold harvesters shining
in the first fall light, more terrible than the graveyards
one passed on the outskirts, Indian-fringed with alders . . .

The things were like a song, that could only be heard near
the earth,
only two or three inches above it: of men becoming
what they did to live; of raw skill, contempt for the mind;
or just of conditions, equal and without rancor,
of the slow flesh, that has no hope not to vanish
with all it touches . . . whispering, near the earth.

And yet if it was high summer, and the road wound
along the bluffs where the tall old scalloped houses
stood embraced by verandas, I invariably
would ask my mother, "Don't you wish we lived here?"
She would sigh, or else be drawn—*of course not, no*
theater, no art museums, no real friends—

And she was right: I didn't, really; what I loved
were the Triple A timetable cards, *Vandalia*
16 minutes, 30 minutes Centralia;
the never quite being in one place, the wind
always the same through the scarcely opened windows;

and yet being everywhere; and, as I grew older, imagining
someone waiting—as if I were called to scatter love
like a wanderer scattering apples, through death's arbitrary
stations and ends . . .

*

—When the moon moves and the bare driftwood splinters
stand out on the Nevada station wall
I close my eyes, lie on a hard bench, and see

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when I am too guilty to picture you, it is you,
the scarps toward your breasts . . .

—It is last year's antlers, pointing somewhere in the
mountains.

—Yes, you were always one for pointing elsewhere;
and yet there is no place you have not given.
You always lived in the only house with a tower
in the level prairie town.
Your hair was the red Southern clearing, its snakes and
lianas;
your eyes a torn screen door
somewhere flashing on coolness.
The empty watery taste of motel air at day's end
is a scarf
you left behind you,
a view of weeds in new earth by a train scar.

And when we meet at the last cottonwood
going into the desert,
drawn up in the dry whisper
of her leaves on themselves
over and over,
will we spring together
into the final jewelcase of the air?

—We are lying together so far across the moonlight,
you can feel the weeds start growing through your hair.

*

Aunt Mary Alice always asked if the girls I liked
had auburn hair. Uncle Harold, she said, always
liked auburn-haired girls—
though hers was dark, darker
than the foxfur stole I loved on her, with the real
little teeth and paws, and the little tawny depthless
glass-chip eyes.

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—This was beyond the desert,
beyond the distance where America
almost floats off in the blueness between mesas
and thunderheads, an opaline shudder neither
transparence nor obstruction . . .

beyond that end, a city
that seemed a slightly seasick form of motion,
sea palms and mountain pines, the smell of driving,
the center always just behind you—unless

it centered, as for me, up stairs exhaling
dry stucco, in a room with carefully kept
American coin silver, the mantel clock bonging,
and a sampler with not HOME SWEET HOME but a
woolly
locomotive, car, and ocean liner, and OVER
THE LAND/OVER THE SEA/TRAVELLING FAR
AND WIDE.

And under it, leg raised and gauzed, no traveller
but a man cars couldn't keep from leaping onto—
off of jacks; unnoticed and unbraked in driveways—
until he had little underarm skin left to be grafted
and "take," or not, over long weeks, on his leg's
reopened tread,
my Uncle Harold sat waiting,
eyes bulging as he talked, a rapid-fire
high harmonica twang of hyperbolic
bewilderment, that comes back a tune without words, or
the broken
words of old age: how his footsteps cracked in the air
of subzero prairie mornings; how they drove a hundred
miles
to pick up everyone, "out to Burbank, the big bands came
there—"

A song heard near the earth, only two or three inches above it . . .

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And my father listening, almost abashed, only later
shaking his head at how much he'd heard about fishing
trips—
yet fond, and almost guilty; and, for all his professorial
moustache, so like his brother, their long skulls
all angles and knobs, and the hair spurting out of them
in short sparky wires—all hardness, but hardness never
at peace with itself: the expression formal, shy,
and ready to break apart in *Jeepers creepers*
haywire whimsy—like a machine some Futurist
was designing, while they walked to school, on the
icy Plains.

*

What held him there in L.A.? —the mantel clock bonging
musically, with a long premonitory rasp
on the quarter hour, that, hurrying time, held it
still, unimportant, adrift . . .

My grandfather,
in the Depression—the last farm gone, the cow
sold, it was said, "so George could go to college"—
failed to see a streetcar as he came home one sunrise
from his last job, night-watchman
at a warehouse, in L.A. . . .

And all his children
lingered, except my father, already gone; and one
uncle, whom I hardly knew,
retired early, married late, and bought a trailer,
and lived, it seemed, in a kind of roving family
of trailer-couples, linking up near Christmas
in Guadalajara; in the spring, up Oregon way . . .

depthless, to us, as if he'd stepped off in that air
between mesa and cloud.

*

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I thought I knew what Uncle Harold did. Then, once, at
our place
(our summer place, in Monterey) a wall-outlet failed.

I said, "We'll have to get an electrician."

Uncle Harold said, "I am an electrician."

I said, "You're kidding. I thought you—"
and suddenly
I didn't quite know what I'd thought. I looked to my
father,
but he just looked surprised, and said with an indefinable
hurt in his voice,
"Of course your Uncle Harold
is an electrician."

Harold worked for Lockheed: the intricate
circuits that held the big jets up in the sky.
But that wasn't the point: my mother and I were outsiders
on any such ground.
Sometimes, on the trip, he'd compare
his arm with ours, where it rested, freckle-stained
as a gas station floor, on the rim of the open window—
"I can't tan the way you people do, I only burn";
or watching a home movie, after twenty years, would get
angry
at the way she was standing, off by herself, in the hallway
of his parents' house.
And one winter, in Chicago—

"I'm not going to work in the factory, after all,"
I yelled at him.

(I'd gotten a D in Phys. Ed. For two weeks, total silence
on the subject. I conferred with my mother:

"But those aren't his values. He doesn't play ball, or—"

And she: "Whatever men want for themselves, for their
sons
they want the other."

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"But a professor—"

"Just
because they're professors, they can't stop being men . . ."

—leaving me wondering just what *I* was, included
in this sad, superior, helpless, womanly
understanding . . .)

Now, *going to work in the factory*
hung in the lunch-table air. Then my father saying,
with deadly calm,

"Two of my brothers did."

I rushing in heedless, "But Daddy, you were the exception
in your family. If a professor's kid—"

He managed the worldly, world-weary smile of his prose,
feeling fused with intellect. "Oh, I know,
you're the exception—"

"I didn't say that. What I said was, *you* were—"

Then the voice of the Lord in thunder, drowning me out:

"You're the exception! You're always the exception!"

*

Two of my brothers did: it was his wish
he hated, completed in mine. . . .

When Uncle Harold
failed to show up for a family reunion, or awkwardly
we had to shift at the last minute and stay
with one of my aunts—

As a child, I didn't notice.

Later, the explanations:

"He can't touch a drop now, or—"

"He was the one who went down to the morgue when our
father—"

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But Aunt Mary Alice, looking down at her own
arthritis-jewelled fingers,
said once, "Harold has fine hands, a surgeon's hands.
He wanted to be a doctor, but the Depression—
and 'the cow was sold for George to go to college'—"

When I told my father, he winced, as if he'd bitten
something sour, then sighed, "Harold wanted to be
everything.
He was going to write a great novel, and we'd all
be famous from it. He'd make a million dollars
on the movie—"

He didn't, of course. Like my father, he gave
half his paycheck to keep their parents in their own house,
until the sunrise and the streetcar . . .

He *did his duty*, in that brontosaurian
language my father spoke more, when they'd been
together,
as he laughed at jokes on "the colored"; remembered his
Model T Ford.

*

Small wonder, then, when "the t.b."
returned in him, after years
of late-night writing, slowly angrier nerves,
and he hung in the balance all summer, needing seven
times the normal dose of drugs—
I turned
to Christ, the eternal son, who dies a little
(or much) to live beyond his father's justice
without calling it a lie.

I gave up my childhood anger—
its study of execution and torture, that put the iron
and smoke of Chicago winter into my soul—
in a kind of floating calm, a long June
dusk of forgiveness, in which the city

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lay murmuring interfused, the dying
and the newly born.

I thought it ungodly to fear death;
though in daydreams I saw my spirit, airborne
above my body, in a hospital bed like my father's,
hover near the bowed heads, ecstatic to tell them how silly
they were not to know how simple it was—then pausing
in a white ceiling corner, not quite sure where to go.

And my father, in his loose-hanging hospital gown,
haggard, slowed down enough to be sweet and wry,
not embarrassed, at my first crush on a girl—
making me know the Mystery
was simply true: in suffering
we were reborn.

But, when he recovered, things weren't much changed.
He'd still
sing, as on leaving Chicago, the last ten miles
approaching "our shanty." But when we'd actually driven
up Monterey Heights, almost to its scalplock of pines . . .

It's a scene I somehow never entirely escape from.
The fog already coming in; or perhaps not, and glare.
The earthless white granite soil and pine-needle duff.
My parents go over every inch of the house
for "the tenants'" misdoings, every vanished glass or
scratch in the varnish, as if it would tell them what
is missing from what they wanted.

Wherever they move,
the floor gives
its slight, incurable booming reverberation
from the space too big for a crawl-space and never
finished as a cellar. My father's anger mounts,
shakes everything, ceases, each year, in no particular
relation to what is lost.

I sit in my room, too visible
from the other rooms, the stucco arc of street;

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and as I might think of a person—a pair of perfect,
calm, understanding eyes—think of Chicago,
where there are other people, worn gold
interiors to glimpse from the car at night, returning,
in a rush of such black, such deep-gripped-down
cottonwood trees, my own life would grip down
and sleep on itself, dark, full, opening our door
on rich books, peaceful must.

But that is gone
to the far side of the summer. Christ
is less a refuge. If I am not to live
a frozen ghost in the middle wind, a distance
that can never become a place, I must

be here, with them.

*

When I was fourteen I made up a sentence: *we are*
unhappy
because we have no roots.
I wasn't sure of it; I'd read something like it in *Time*.
Perhaps we weren't unhappy, or *too many roots*
would have been truer . . .

But I know it struck on

something in me; some place where I was dreaming,
against us, an image of the true house, solid
on the solid land: the summers falling stationary
through the bay windows; piano music dampered
at night, in the thick leaves; and up the stairs
unnumbered branching alcoves, sisters, silences—

like a house in a book, where a distant lake was visible
from one upper window—enough endlessness
to rest a family in each other and
the ground beneath,

so that, if one lived there, a life

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would fall like an image: first love to white stone a falling
of original leaves . . .
and the unseen sister upstairs
comes out and gathers it all into her hands.

That was my dream, as we passed the small towns
sleeping . . .
But what my father remembered (though he could never
approve of himself
for having arrived there) were the intimations
of a world beyond: how a store would have, from some
wanderer,
almost postage-stamp-sized books, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* or
Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae Sub Regno Cynarae . . .

And though I said *we are unhappy, we have no roots*, I
know
when I reach back as far as I can for an image
of happiness, I come to images of travel:

the DIP signs in the desert, the runningboards
and buck-tan interiors of '40s cars;
or asking my parents, in Needles, California,
one night when I was four, "How far away are the stars?"—

expecting I don't know what, a few city blocks
or even as far as L.A.—and then the vastness
of the answer somehow soothing, as our departure
soothed, back in Chicago, the dinosaur bones, the
chairs . . .

We seem contented in vastness, as we do not, wholly,
anyplace solid, where our weight and distance
can be determined . . . in this, "the exception"
though we are forever, most purely American.

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Self-Examination

Lawrence Shainberg

Like so much brain damage, the first symptoms that mine produced were almost indistinguishable from normal behavior. In a man less sensitive to his neurology, and less knowledgeable in matters of neuroanatomy and neurophysiology, they might have gone unnoticed, or if noticed, filed away among that enormous class of behavior (sometimes called, for want of a better word, "psychological") that one does not associate with the brain. For me, however, such dismissal was impossible. Twenty-one years a neurosurgeon, I had seen hundreds, even thousands of people with brain damage, and I knew all too well that the early symptoms are often so unremarkable as to leave no trace, even in brains unafflicted with amnesia, in the memory. Brain damage is rarely as grotesque as one expects it to be. It's true that it can strike like a hurricane, but sometimes it's more like a gentle breeze, a subtle change of vectors that leaves you headed, not in the opposite direction, but almost exactly where you were headed before. A charming eccentricity becomes embarrassing, private habits go public, it gets a little harder to keep things to yourself. I've seen it begin with farting or belching, nose-picking, cursing,

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bragging, talking or laughing too much or not at all, a lean to the left or a lean to the right, too many adjectives, self-absorption, visions of grandeur, arrogance, dogmatism, distraction, indecision or impatience. Some patients can't admit mistakes, and some think everything they do is wrong. There's nothing the brain can't use when it turns against you. Why should it surprise us that when it goes askew it proceeds at first along familiar routes, taking the line of least resistance, like water flowing down a mountain or an artist painting portraits of his friends?

That morning, while my wife was making coffee, I decided not to move. As I saw it, it was a clear-cut decision, a choice I could neither explain nor resist, but Father, a neurosurgeon like myself who had always been conservative in matters such as these, saw it differently. His voice was extremely vivid and believable, so much like one that originated in the auditory cells rather than those involved with memory or imagination that I could not believe he wasn't sitting beside me. What I called a decision he called an incapacity. "I don't want to go into the decision-making process," he said, "the neurology of Frontal Lobe behavior and all that, but time and again the research has demonstrated that motor behavior takes precedence over willpower. A man can no more will himself in the direction of paralysis than he can will himself not to breathe. The needs of the body simply cannot be malnourished." Malnourished?! Until Mother corrected him, I thought I'd heard him wrong. "'Malnourished?'" she laughed. "Just because he's incoherent doesn't mean that you should not be recalcitrant. Who said decided not to anything? About breathing? All he said is move, and who are you to play this kind of nourishment reasoning instead of?"

I was not yet so far gone that I missed the point that they were missing. The real question, what had to be determined before I could proceed with explaining my condition, was whether the decision I claimed to have made had preceded or succeeded my paralysis. In other words, whether I could not or did not wish to move, whether I was paralyzed or stubborn or perhaps merely lazy, whether *my brain* or *I myself* had re-

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stricted my mobility, whether my problem was finally to be classified as "neurological" or "psychological." Needless to say, it was not a question with which I was unfamiliar. Very often, with brain-damaged patients, the first and perhaps the greatest issue is the delegation of responsibility. Who's boss, in other words, you or your brain? Some patients think they're responsible for everything, some nothing, and some go back and forth, telling themselves one minute that their brain is the cause of their mistakes, the next that—through ignorance, perversity, laziness or some other shortcoming—they've no one to blame but themselves. To further complicate the matter, there are those among the latter group who draw so much inspiration from the psychological position that they often claim responsibility where none is justified. Inflicted with amnesia, they blame themselves as if by an act of will or concentration their memory will improve. "Think, damn it, what was her name?" If efforts to speak produce incoherence, they curse themselves as one might for overeating, cowardice or laziness. In effect, their symptoms make them feel guilty. People of the opposite inclination, on the other hand, feel no guilt at all. Why should they when, as they see it, their brains are responsible for everything they do? When even laziness or selfishness is neurochemical? Blaming yourself for what your brain is doing is like blaming yourself for the behavior of a stranger. This sort of patient, nothing makes him so happy as proof that his brain is damaged. So distinct are these two types that our department had tried for years to devise research to investigate them. What we wanted to locate, of course, was the neurophysiology that produced such inclinations as well as the neurophysiology which they in turn produced. Wasn't that the fundamental issue? What sort of brain leaned toward the psychological explanation and what sort leaned toward the neurological? And once a brain had moved in one direction or the other, once the neurological or psychological explanation was circulating in the cortex, what was its effect upon the nervous system in general, what sort of chemical and electrical changes did it induce?

My wife was a small woman with very broad shoulders and

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hair cut short like a boy's. She wore unmatched earrings, a single pearl in the left ear and a gold loop in the right. On her left forearm was a small tattoo of the Yin-Yang symbol which she'd got in Kathmandu, fourteen years before, when she was working in Tibetan refugee camps. I didn't know her name but I was convinced it began with "M." In an attempt to jog my memory, I made a list—"Martha, Marjorie, Mary, Millie, Marlene, Melissa, Margaret, and (not realizing my mistake) Nancy"—but not one of these names elicited that happy sensation the brain secretes when the proper box has been opened and such perverse hide-and-seek games have been foiled. Feeling bereft, just on the verge of panic in fact, I made a conscious, a willful decision, embracing "Martha" with conviction that was transparent in its insincerity, thinking "Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha," as if to seduce my brain, as if by repetition it could be persuaded of what it knew to be incorrect.

She placed my mug on my nighttable, then climbed into bed beside me. As the aroma of coffee spread through the room, I felt a tremendous desire for it but this desire had an inverse effect, strengthening my original decision, my resolution not to move. I knew I'd feel better if I drank my coffee, so much so perhaps that decisions of the sort which had arrested my movement would pass through my brain without arousing the slightest interest, much less attachment, much less a need to act on them, but the very image of such improvement made all thoughts of coffee abhorrent to me. Soon its aroma lost its appeal, becoming bitter, acidic, almost nauseating in its effect. Thus did I discover that my olfactory cells were also participating in my collapse. I'm not sure why, but this information struck me as extremely significant, and it caused me to take note of my condition in a way I had not done before. Suddenly, I was no longer interested in distinguishing between different causes for my immobility, whether I could not or would not move, whether movement was possible and rejected or impossible and believed to be rejected. The indisputable fact was that I wasn't moving. Several times, unless I'm mistaken, the wish to move had actually crystallized

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within me—I saw myself sitting up, for example, drinking my coffee, talking to Martha, etc.—but the resolution had led to nothing. I had an idea my body was stiffening, edging toward rigidity, but even more disturbing was the fact that this sensation, despite its discomfort, produced an overwhelming feeling of exhilaration. Is it possible that I had already attained the freedom that so many brain-damaged patients achieve, the state of mind in which pain itself becomes a source of happiness?

Father and Mother continued their bickering, but now another voice appeared. Though often repetitive and strident, it had confidence and authority, even omniscience. In fact, it was my own thoughts it seemed to be voicing. Even when I disagreed with it, it seized my interest and attention. It was almost as if, alone among my voices, it was not originating in my brain. How is it, I asked myself, that certain regions of the brain seem to be outside it? I was thinking of the cells that produce the pronouns "I" or "me," the whole idea of what one calls "myself." When you try to persuade yourself to do something, tell yourself, for example, "Get out of bed!" or "Drink your coffee!", which cells are talking and which are they addressing? It seemed to me that, of all the questions brain damage had offered me, none were deeper or more important than these, none so worthy of investigation. I swore to myself that if I ever got better I'd devote myself to researching them, but even as I made this vow, I suspected that, if I really got better, such questions would never occur to me. Furthermore, it struck me that thoughts like these could very well be the worst of my symptoms. Why would one question the voices that seem outside the brain when the very fact that one thinks them outside is the source of their strength within?

In any event, the position taken by this voice was that my decision not to move was less about paralysis than brain damage in general. In other words, it wasn't just immobility I wanted to explore but the whole world of neurological incapacity. Furthermore, unlike Mother and Father, it considered this decision not only rational but courageous. Far from viewing it as a subterfuge or a delusion, it saw brain damage as

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a natural outgrowth of my lifelong scientific and clinical preoccupations, namely my interest in the human brain. Having studied the brains of others, was it not natural that I had now determined to study my own? And what better way to do that than by cultivating symptoms of one's own? As it built its argument, the voice became more passionate. "What can we learn from a normal brain?" it cried."If words appear whenever we need them, what do we learn about the cells which have produced them? It's only the failing brain that reveals its secrets to us. Every symptom is a mine of information! This is why he's happy with his amnesia! This is why he isn't moving now! What you see before you is not neurological dysfunction but neurological research!"

But consider the speed of the brain! This proclamation, as I understood it, required less than one or two seconds. It was as if the words occurred all at once instead of one after another, as if, like a photographic image, they'd originated, not in the language regions of my brain, but in the Optic Lobe. By the time Marjorie spoke to me, it was all complete and stored in my memory, a source of fear already that it might be forgotten.

"Drogin? Are you awake? Please sit up. I've got to talk to you."

Legs drawn up so as to form the blanket into a tent with her knees, she cradled her coffee at her chest and stared at it with a concentration that seemed to me willful, almost maniacal. She always used the same mug, a blue and white striped ceramic with a handle large enough for all her fingers. Looming over me, she looked much taller than I remembered, also stronger and, now I think of it, a bit intimidating. A single tear moved slowly over her cheek and fell onto the shoulder of my t-shirt, the old yellow t-shirt she used as a nightgown. Given my condition, it's no surprise I guess that I saw this tear as a neurological event, not an indication of emotion, even persisted in this point-of-view after Mother berated me for it and Father, in a half-hearted attempt to defend me, explained that "coldness" and "detachment" were typical of those with brain damage. "Once your brain has betrayed you," he said, "it's very hard to trust it. And if you can't trust it, how can you

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feel what ordinary people feel? How can you be a true human being?"

"We've got to talk," Martha said, and then, "Dammit, sit up, will you? This is serious."

Tears came heavily now. As often when she was upset, her voice was thin and slightly whiny, a bit like a ten-year-old's. "It's no good anymore between us. We've got to let go. I know you've heard me say this before, but this time I mean it. I've got to get a place of my own. I can't postpone it any longer. Goddamm it, I feel like I'm dying! Wasting my life! I've got to learn to be alone, take care of myself. If I don't connect with myself, how can I connect with you? I'm not saying I don't love you. But it's all habit now, mechanical, automatic, look how we fucked last night, no passion, just going through the motions, I don't blame you, I blame myself." She'd stopped crying now. As she sipped her coffee, her eyes were shining with excitement, and her face was fierce, defiant and slightly playful, I thought, one eye squinting now and then as if aiming at a target. With every word she spoke her voice grew stronger and clearer until the whine disappeared and she sounded her age again. It wasn't divorce she wanted, she said, just a year or two of "partial separation." Maybe we'd see each other for dinner or an occasional weekend. Even sex if we felt like it. We didn't have to be rigid about it. Who knows? Maybe with space between us, solitude and privacy, we'd appreciate each other again, stop taking each other for granted. Why should we let our marriage disintegrate the way most marriages did? If we really loved each other, we had to find a way to be lovers again.

While she was talking, another symptom had made its appearance. I was thinking more than one thing at a time. At least two and sometimes three or four. No sooner did I start in one direction than I headed in another. What it amounted to was a constant stream of interruption, thoughts interrupted by secondary thoughts, secondary thoughts interrupted, etc. Most of the time I could not remember what I'd been thinking even seconds before I tried to do so. Time and again, I asked myself, "What was I thinking?" but far from settling my thoughts, or rather settling me on a single thought, such ques-

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tions became another interruption. And in the midst of such babble, Martha's voice became, for all intents and purposes, inaudible. How could I follow her thoughts when I couldn't follow my own? Though she went on for several minutes, I heard nothing more until she realized I wasn't listening.

"Jesus Christ, where the fuck are you? Would you please tell me where you are? Jesus Christ!" She threw off the covers, got out of bed and stalked out of the room. On the way to the "roof," I figured, meaning "bathroom." I heard her cursing me—"Motherfucker, sonofabitch, cocksucker," etc.—but by the time she returned, she'd turned her anger on herself. "Okay, I get it. If I were you, I wouldn't listen either. I've been saying this for years, right? I'm full of shit, right? Self-centered, spoiled, neurotic, why should you listen? Well, goddammit, I'm tired of being this way! I don't want it anymore! This time, you'll see . . . I mean it! How can I change, living with you? Our marriage is a womb! Comfort and safety and whatever I do you approve of. How can I change when I feel so secure? I'm hiding behind you, Izzy. You're my father and my mother. If I don't have the guts to let go of you, I'll stay a child forever."

I noticed now that in the bathroom she'd put on her white karate training suit—her "gi". On weekday mornings, she went to her karate school, what they called the "dojo," before she went to work, but on Sundays she did her morning workout at home. She'd removed her earrings and put on a red headband. Her black belt hung on her shoulder, but now, facing the mirror on the back of the bedroom door, she tied it on with an air of solemnity, knotting it, looping it, centering it precisely below her navel.

"You're not getting up?" she said.

"No," I said.

"Are you all right?"

"I don't know. I think I have brain damage."

"So? Who doesn't?"

Crossing the room, she bowed before the altar she'd set up on a small table in the corner. It consisted of a small jade Buddha, a ceramic water bowl, a vase containing a single yellow

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rose, and a bronze, sand-filled Tibetan incense stand. Lighting a stick of incense, she centered it carefully in the stand, then pressed her palms together and bowed again. Finally, kneeling, she sat back on her calves, and with palms cupped in her lap, thumbs touching, commenced her workout as she always did, with two minutes of meditation.

On the pillow, my head moved slowly from side to side, and a smile spread over my face. This was motor behavior, as I understood it, nothing to do with me. Still, it was not without its repercussions. Along with Mother's and Father's, several voices I did not recognize began to shout at me, and the voice I called my own insisted that, once and for all, I diagnose myself. "Begin at the beginning!" it cried. "Is this brain damage or hysteria? Research or pathology? Are you faking it? Enjoying it? Is it panic you feel or an interest in panic?" Unable to answer any of these questions, I decided to take its advice and examine myself as if I were one of my patients. If I were truly brain damaged, I would admit it, and if I weren't, I would stop pretending that I was.

"What's your name?"
"Isaac Drogin."
"Address?"
"I don't know."
"How old are you?"
"Forty-four."
"Height?"
"Five-nine."
"Weight?"
"One-fifty-five."
"What color eyes?"
"Brown."
"Hair?"
"Blond."
"Where were you born?"
"I don't know."
"Yes, you do."
"No, I don't."

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"What's your work?"
"Neurosurgeon."
"Where?"
"The hospital."
"Which hospital?"
"I don't know."
"You're lying."
"I know."
"Why?"
"I don't know."

Millie had begun her stretching exercises, a short routine she'd learned in India, when for a time she'd been a student of Hatha Yoga. Placing her palms together at her chest, she closed her eyes, spread her arms, arched her back, kneeled with hands beside her feet, jumped so that her legs were stretched behind her, dropped her chest to the floor, raised her hips, straightened her legs, spread her arms and arched her back again, then finally finished as she'd begun, with palms together at her chest. Each movement was accompanied by an audible inhalation or exhalation. She repeated this four times, then moved on to other postures: a headstand, a shoulderstand, a spinal twist to each side, and finally, a series of breathing exercises. Sitting back on her heels, she pressed her thumb against her right nostril, inhaled for approximately ten seconds through her left, and then held her breath for nearly a minute. Then she lifted her thumb and closed her left nostril with her ring finger and exhaled for maybe twenty seconds through her right. Keeping her fingers in the same position, she inhaled through her right nostril and exhaled through her left. Six times she repeated the series until finally, completing the warmup as she always did, she closed her eyes and lay on her back with her hands palm up at her sides. She remained like this for four or five minutes, and then, still motionless on the carpet, out of my line of sight, she called to me: "Are you awake?"

"Yes," I said.

"What's happening?"

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"Nothing."

"How's the brain damage?"

"Fine," I said.

Standing now, she began her karate practice, an abbreviated workout which her teacher had designed for use at home. Watching herself carefully in the mirror on the back of the bedroom door, she did front-kicks and back-kicks and side-kicks and one kick that began at the floor and snapped like a whip at a point above her head. Each kick was repeated at least ten and sometimes as many as twenty times, and each was accompanied by a forced, audible exhalation that sounded like the respirator we used in surgery. She practiced different kinds of punches with each hand, blocking maneuvers with her legs and arms, and then she did a whole series of exercises to loosen her pelvic and shoulder sockets. Perspiring freely but not breathing hard, she practiced the knife-hand thrust which was used, as she'd once explained to me, to put out an opponent's eye or to strike the center of his neck, worked on block-punch combinations and concluded her preliminary workout with yet another breathing exercise—a wide-mouthed inhalation followed by a forced exhalation in which she squeezed her stomach and abdomen to expel as much air as possible. She repeated this maybe a dozen times, holding her breath longer with each repetition, exhaling with greater force, and her face grew progressively redder and more contorted with effort until, in the last few repetitions, it looked to be in pain.

Though I was not displeased with my examination, a certain uneasiness had followed several of my answers. Not, surprisingly, "I don't know," but "blond" and "brown" as well as, to a lesser extent, "five-nine." Each of these had produced, almost instantly, feelings of discomfort and disappointment and a larger, more diffuse sensation, something akin to, but a bit more severe than, shame. Did this mean that my hair was not "blond," my eyes not "brown," my height not "five-nine"? Had I been less professional, or a bit more impatient, I'd have accepted this conclusion—e.g., that I was suffering from an amnesic condition which had caused me to lose such information as my height, the color of my eyes, etc.—without looking fur-

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ther. For there was no arguing the fact that a man who called himself "blond" when blond was not, in fact, the color of his hair, would experience (provided, of course, that the true color of his hair continued to reside in his accessible memory) a sensation not unlike the one I was feeling now.

What I knew, however, was that, under certain neurological conditions, even a man whose hair is blond can experience uneasiness upon describing himself as such. For one thing, there are certain forms of brain damage in which, because the neurology of disappointment is itself askew, even the most impeccable behavior leaves you feeling like a failure. What's happened of course is that one part of the brain has expected something which another has failed to produce, but who knows whether the disappointment has arisen out of dysfunction in the region that expects or the region that produces? Where a word like "blond" is concerned, you can't tell, until you've actually pinpointed the source of your brain damage, whether your disappointment is valid or invalid, proof that "blond" is incorrect or a sign that, even though it isn't, the chemistry of disappointment has been initiated in your brain.

This is not to say that I had discounted the possibility that my disappointment was justified, having arisen out of the simple fact that "blond" was not the color of my hair. But if this were the case, there was a whole different range of dysfunctions to consider. "Blond" could be caused by amnesia or aphasia or a combination of the two, a memory defect which had caused me to remember my hair as blond even though it wasn't, or a language problem which had led me, even though I remembered it as brown, for example, or red, or purple, to call it "blond" because I believed that "blond"*meant* "brown" or "red" or "purple." Nor was it impossible that my aphasia was conceptual rather than linguistic, a result of my having lost somehow the basic sense of color, or hair, or both, ideas which, for normal brains, made a question like, "What color is your hair?" comprehensible, so that the very essence of the question had eluded me, and my answer, though seemingly inaccurate, had been correct within its context, an appropriate response, as it were, to inappropriate conditions.

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For all the precision of this analysis, however, I knew that I had yet to consider the really difficult, the fearful possibilities, the diagnoses which left the realm of language or memory and entered those of choice and willpower, that vast neurological limbo in which illusions of personal control are generated and refined. In the case of "five-nine," for example, was it was not possible that I knew myself to be, say, "five-six" but described myself as taller because I *wished* to be? Could I ignore the possibility that I had known, all along, that my hair was not blond, my height not five-nine, my eyes not brown, but described them as such, for a combination of reasons, *on purpose*? A good neurologist never forgets that, if true-false discrimination is an innate function of the brain, the *desire for truth* is equally so. Disruption of either can produce grotesque distortions of behavior, but in the latter case, if one's impulse toward truth has itself been interrupted, one seeks out falsehood instead of truth, even going so far as to maintain the falsehood with greater conviction after it's been discredited. Knowing full well that one's hair is brown, one calls it "blond," and the very disparity between the word and the reality becomes a source of elation and power, and above all, feelings of independence *vis-ã-vis* the language centers of the brain.

Done with her exercises, Martha went to the bathroom and returned a moment later with a towel. Mopping her face with one hand, she rested the other on my chest as she sat down on the bed beside me. With my head slightly raised by the pillow, I found myself staring at her hand without recognition. In fact, the sight of it frightened me. It was as if some half-dead, mangy bird of prey had landed on my chest. For several years she'd been into breaking boards, demonstrating the technique, in fact, when her dojo held public "introductory sessions" to attract new students, and so her fingers were crooked and slightly discolored by years of practice on the striking board, the purplish swellings at the middle knuckle not unlike a sort of jewelry. Face covered, she spoke into the towel, as much to herself as to me. "God, I never felt so loose. It was like my body took over and my mind just watched what

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was going on. Could you tell?" Sliding the towel beneath her eyes, studying me with half her face concealed, she looked as if she were wearing a surgical mask. "All these years of practice, but sometimes it seems like I've just begun. You do it from habit, automatically, but then suddenly you understand. The roots of your negative energy—that's what you've got to change! All the laziness and distraction, the mindlessness, the selfishness—one straight punch with sincerity, one moment of concentration, one deep breath is all it takes to turn it around. And if you don't do it, you can forget about anything else. Your relationship, your work, it's all empty if your energy is wrong." She leaned and kissed me on the forehead. "Forget what I said before, OK? It was my negativity I was talking about, nothing to do with you. I know where the problem is. It's bullshit to blame it on our marriage."

While she was talking, I looked out the window. For the first time I noticed that it was snowing. Huge flakes drifted back and forth so slowly and haphazardly that as many seemed to rise as fall. The window became a landscape, a dream-landscape, and Martha's voice disappeared within it. Suddenly peaceful, I watched the snowflakes as if I were one of them, as if I were drifting back and forth with the same easy grace. And then all at once a great clarity came upon me, the diagnosis I'd been searching for. I don't know what happened to the arguments and distinctions which had collected around the question of my condition, but suddenly, happily, I thought, "Come off it. This is brain damage, and you know it." Not many words, when you look at them, and certainly nothing that hadn't occurred to me before, but neurologically speaking, the effect of this conclusion was global. Waves of excitation spread through my brain until it seemed to me that every cell was firing. All the voices disappeared, all confusion fell away. I felt as if my feet were back on the ground, my eyes wide open, the whole world illuminated before me. "This is brain damage and you know it!" The power of language had never been so clear to me. That words originating in one group of cells could excite so many others—was there anything we knew

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about the brain, anything in its chemistry or physiology, which could explain such miraculous transformation?

"Hey," Martha said, "what's going on? Are you paralyzed or something? You haven't moved since you woke up."

I laughed. "It's nothing," I said. "I'm just thinking. Trying to figure it out."

"Figure what out?"

"Lots of things, I'll tell you later."

"What's that?" she said, touching my cheek. "Are you crying?"

"No," I said, meaning "yes."

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Portfolio

Drawings

Edward Ruscha

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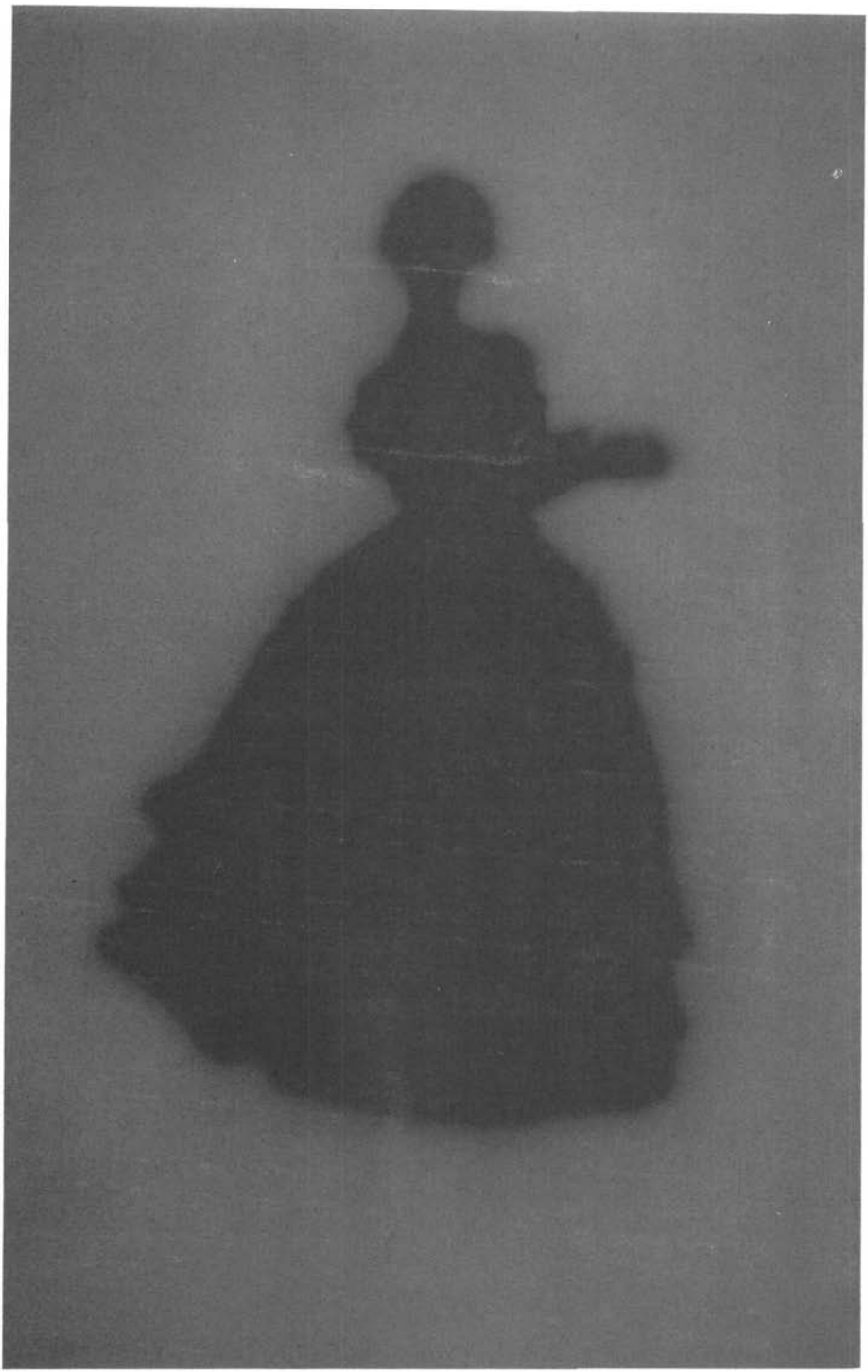

Red Hostess

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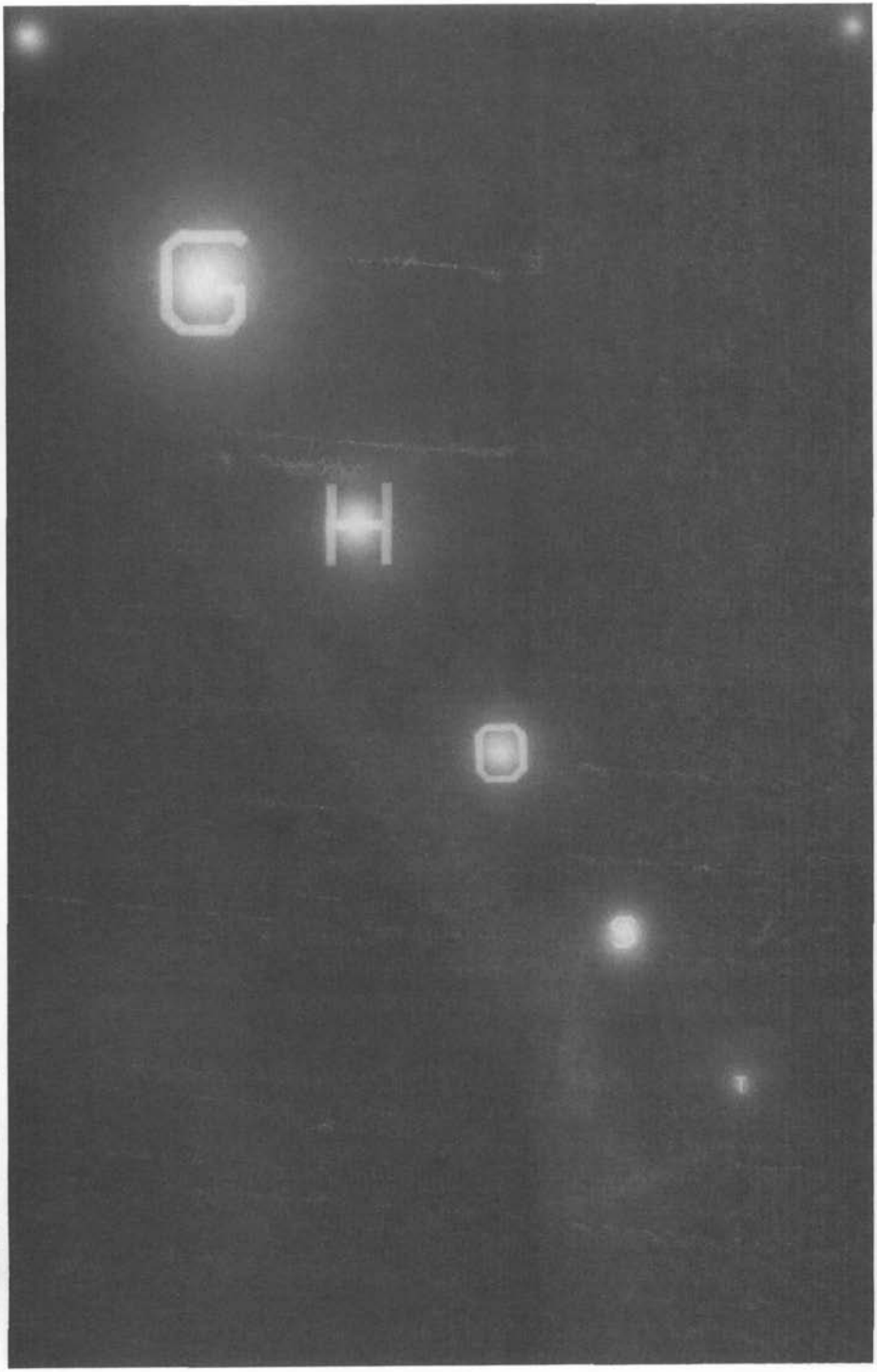

Ghost

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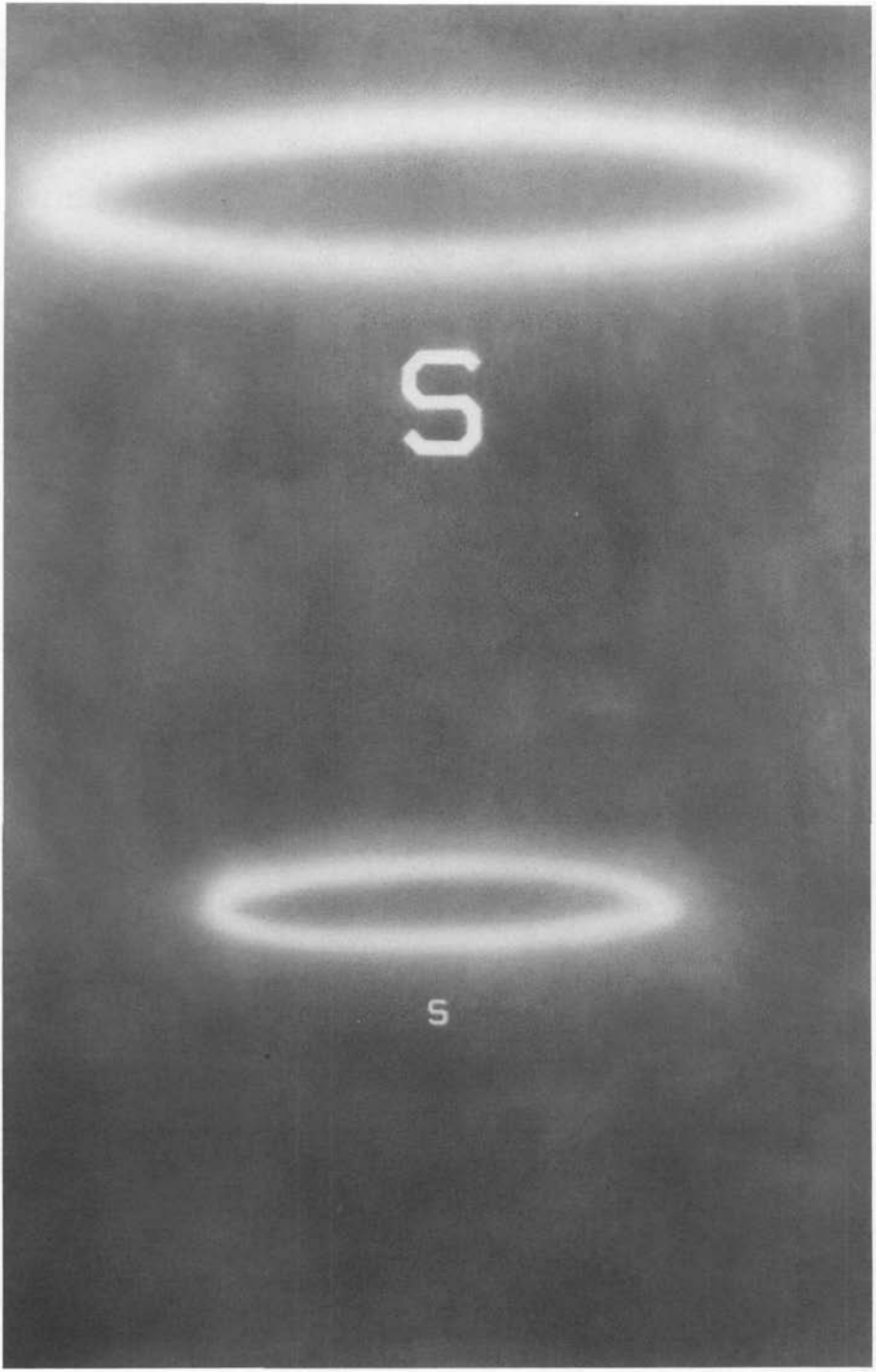

Diminished Respect

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Woman from History

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Carolina

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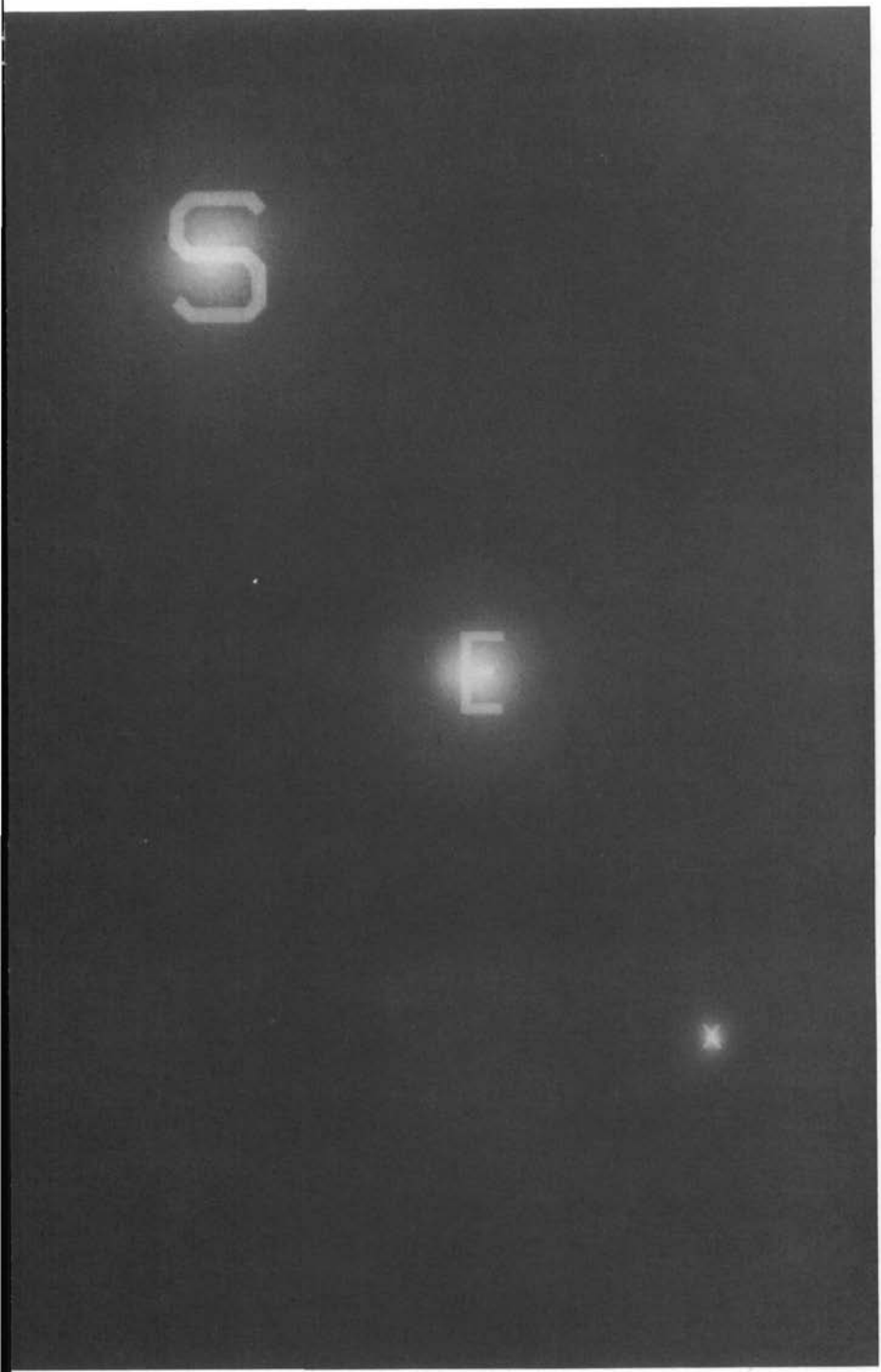

Sex

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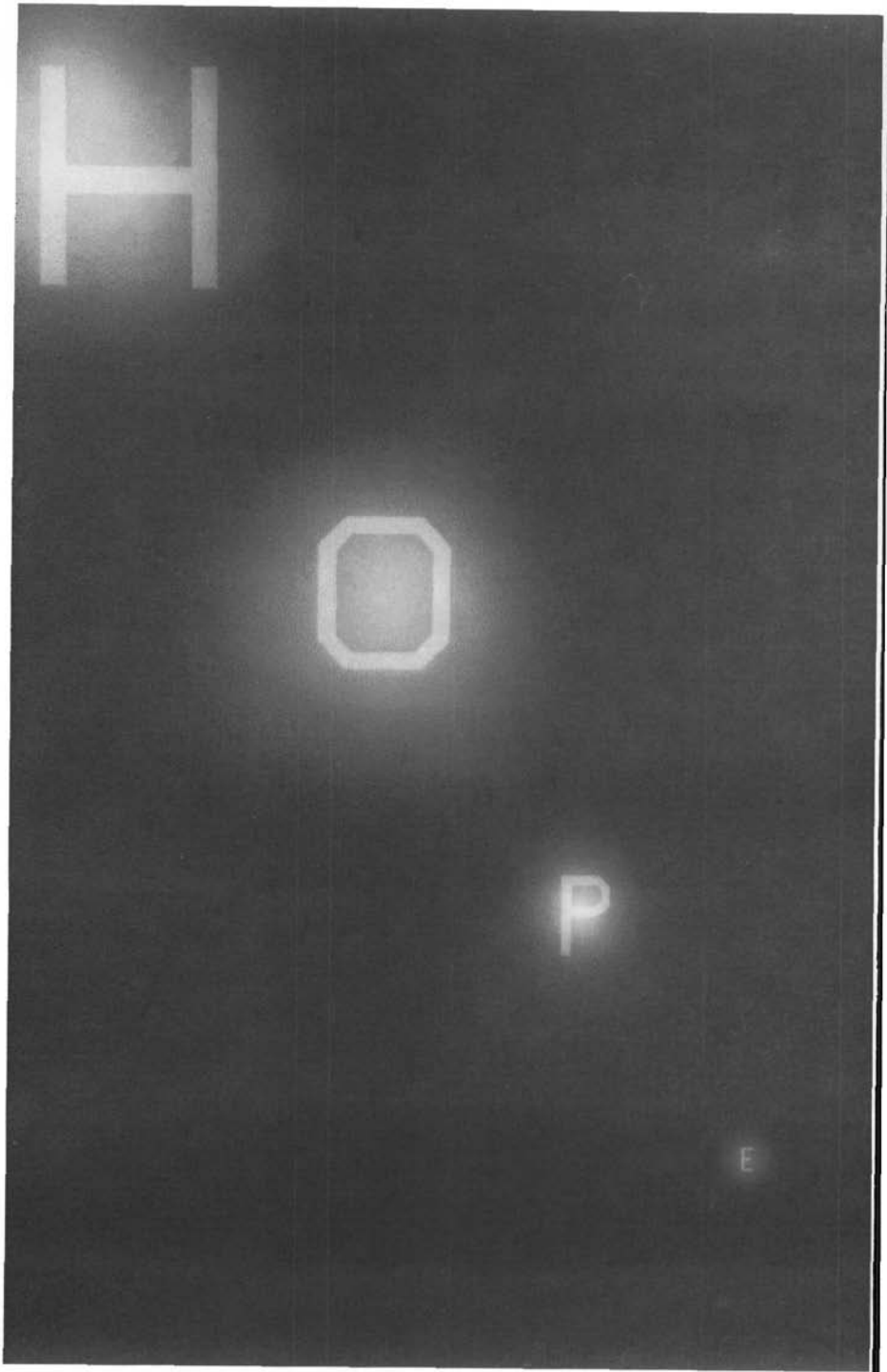

Hope

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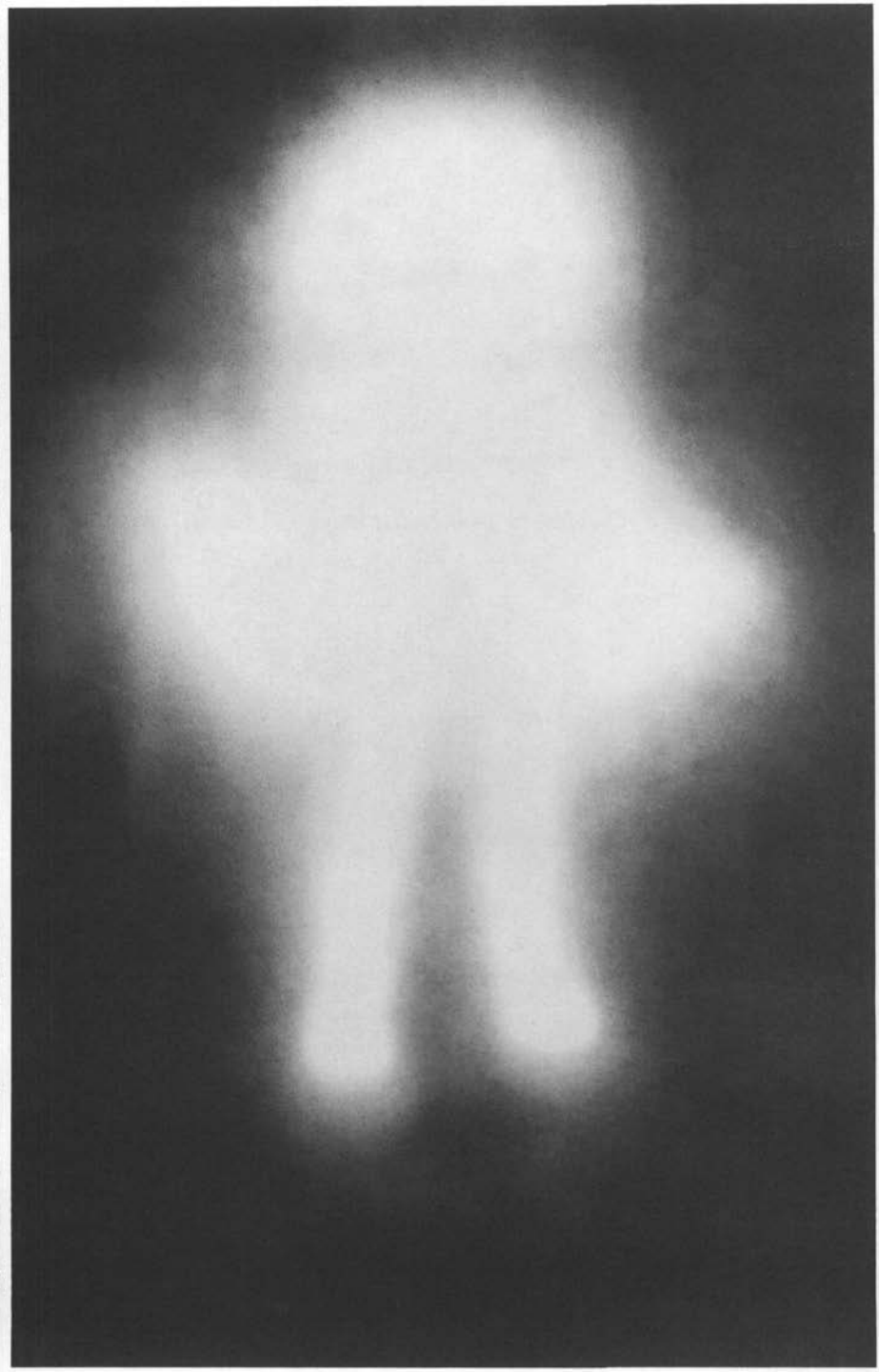

Little White Girl

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Black Hostess

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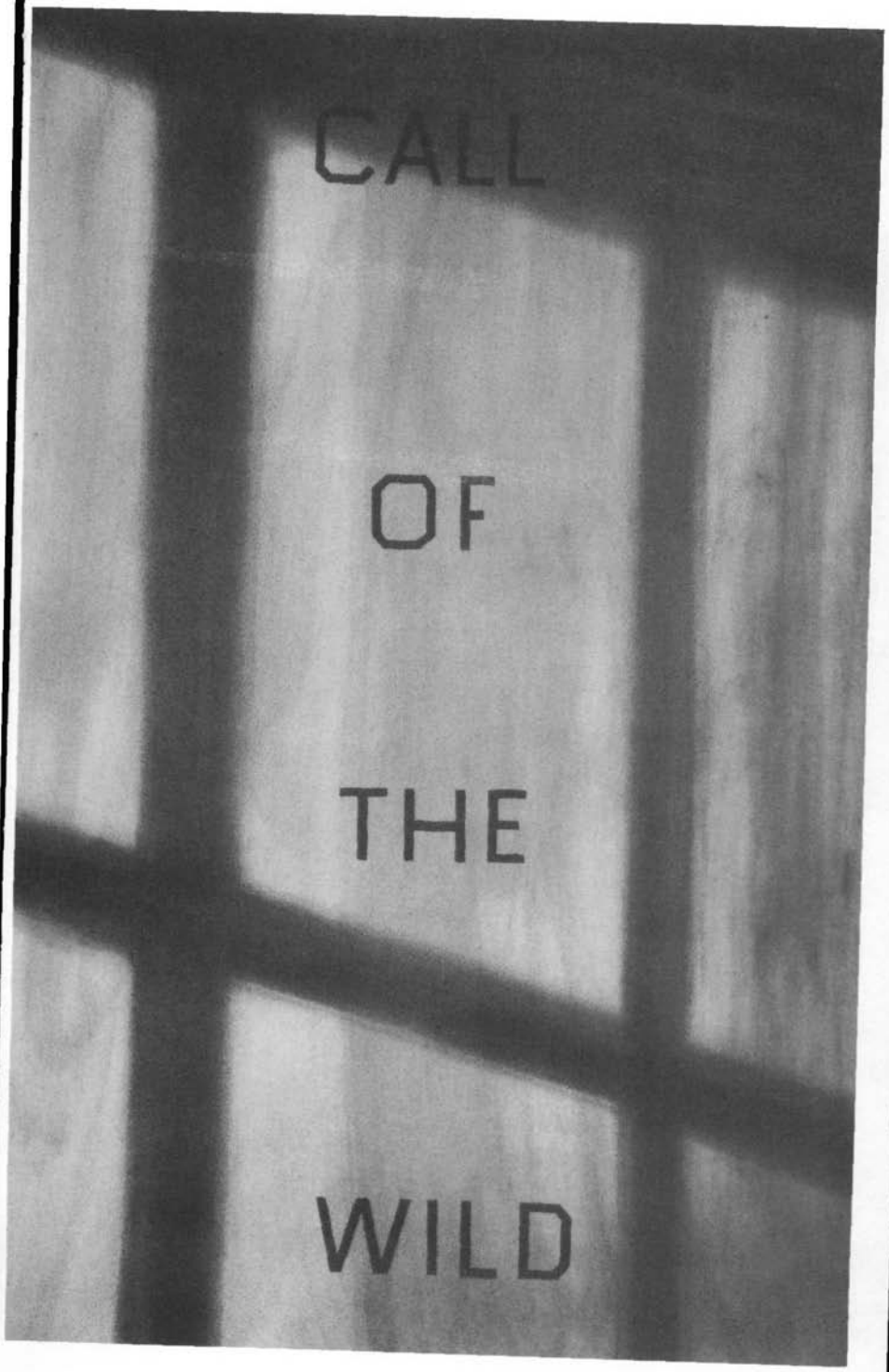

Call of the Wild

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Two Poems by Pier Paolo Pasolini

Italy

Chapter I

O barbarian's pupil-eye encircled
by the sun-born verdure of the Po!
Italy has only one morning of life,
and with the larks of dawn the centuries sing
over the Padanian boy who knows no evening.

Now the shadows of the Appenine are flushed
and under a sun that's almost warm,
along the Reno's clear blue banks,
the rubbish heaps begin to smell. . . .
In the Tagliamento drowsy adolescents wash,
already shedding gravity among the swallows' flights;
on the other shore, in sun, appears a shadow
and with angel's voice the boatman yells.
At Portogruaro a train whistles, rueful;
at Caorle the first sails are motionless in blue
and in the heart of a Venetian boy
with glowing hair a bell resounds.

(Ingenuous pupil rekindled by the fields
where ducks have rose-red feathers
and grass-blue hares dance rapturous fugues
and, candid in the candor of the sun,
larks are singing in your tongue,
and ditches braid black freshnesses,
and clusters of black grapes sparkle on the hills
and bells sound light as air itself. . . .)
Your well-being, sun-born Italy,

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loves only boys who don't love you,
locked in a body of violets that conceals
whether their Tongue is only a dream . . .
who crush you with their egoistic step,
who believe you their possession
or a possession of their families. . . .

The barbarian had come down from the Alps.
In the foothills of Emilia, on the Reno,
no more lark's voice, no more dialect,
but language now had penetrated flesh,
the weight of destiny's first days.
Then the primal bell had fondled him,
the primal swallows come
to paint the sky in blue,
and the primal mother had assailed his heart.
His soul was born in a Friulan hamlet
mixed up with a humid wall
and a stain of water-blackened grass,
his soul that believed itself unique
and danced with sparrows, butterflies.

Chapter II

In Twenty-two, year deep in the century,
Bologna breathed an air of waltzes.
Via Rizzoli, taut with perfumed evenings,
echoed in light, sonorous gold the music
pendant on the young girls brushing
the century with violet feathers.
In the teeming air of an Appenine sun
the happy shadow of the nation's
celebrations—cisalpine colors,
virgin still, of a nascent fatherland!
Liberals, in the salubrious air's aromas,
sparkled like the jeweler's windows

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and the Catholic plumpness of the Baroque
weighed only on the red facades of churches.

Parma—a street and my mother's smile.
On this fleeting apparition
the twilight of a happy epoch
corroding, bleaching the Appenine's gold.
And you, Italy, make a masterpiece of Parma
—white memories in the ducal squares,
leaves breathing velvet autumns in
Padanian boulevards. And it is Autumn
that gnaws the chestnuts of Via Sèmlia,
that bathes the underbrush transfixed in
sun where Slavic children smell of bark. . . .
But if cyclamens tinted red the shadow
and the meadows on the startled mountain
slopes blazed up in perfume toward the
sleeping sun, you, Italy, are Idria's summer,
the dark-green Summer of Via degli Amori.

In the Euganean hills, vanished like dawn snow,
along the Tiber where the twilight
breathes in perfumes from the Latin waters
through the nostrils of ecstatic flocks,
in the valley of the Ossola, glowing in pale green,
in the Aniene's Mediterranean grottos . . .
from Twenty-two to Fifty, years pervaded by
isolated memory, you, Italy, in the morning. . . .

Chapter III

Fresh-shimmering in oleander blue,
before the boat, Lerici's mountain
among La Spezia's lights, while winter
with sun-bitter, breeze-sweet hands
caressed the dawn. And Shelley's bark,
as in a print where green fades into blue,
beaching, grieved the air of Portovenere.
Then morning came and everything was white. . . .

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Bellagio emerges from lime cliffs
and clouds, reflected villas
feathers in the lake's black ink. . . .
A boat, dividing from a mole, doubles
a point, vanishes into a branch that
penetrates the unknown paradise
of a Brianza happy in the winter sun.
In the smuggler's heart Lombardy
lightly vaults its boundaries
while the angels of Rosmini,
flying, make the bells of carillons
resound in vales of the prealps,
and Busto Arsizio's striking workers
stretch out, silent, in the sun, while
their sons fill the precincts of the town
with echoes of celestial blue and
gentle mats of whitewash. And down
along the river runs where winter's
veined with mildness, from Mantua or
Cremona, armed with bows, primrose-
boweled urban boys head toward the Po.

And isn't this the water, black,
between green borders of the greenest
meadow in the world, where the peasant
evening closes on itself in a silence
without sighs between the village
and the sky? Isn't this Casarsa's
shadow at the bell of Angelus?

Chapter IV

In pale after-supper or precocious
evening shadow, despite the vein of
frost that dyes the leaves and mountains
a clear indigo, the families sit outside,
on walks, on thresholds, before houses
that the fading light turns blue.

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And in the square the children, damp, intense,
peal out their games, forgotten among violets.

It's spring in Casarsa. On the square
the lamp is swaying, swollen with the
breathing of new wind, and the whistles
of boys strolling arm-in-arm along the
streets smell as fresh as Easter grasses.

Fly, firefly, above the ditches quaking
with the sleepless songs that drift upon
the dust of villages! Naked, then, the moon
lengthens over the astonished fields, its
limpid music echoing on the leaves and stuccoed
walls, numbing the illuminated air. You,
Italy—too restless or at ease?—asleep,
don't hear the nightingale of madness.

Someone challenges your sapient-nation's sleep!
And, valor-scorched, in the voluntary exile
of his balcony open to the sky, he trembles
at the landscape's night-dark miracle bossed
in silver by the primal moon of the created.

O savage, flaccid instruments that beat,
heavenly echo to the corporal presence
of that ghost of quiet and light!
O roofs, bright to the screech owl's flight!

Italy rising again with dawn from earth,
perfumed virgin of roosters and roots,
marvelously ignorant of the language
with which I, jealous of the morning
light, tried to give voice to its Soul.

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Chapter V

Cracks in the floorboards will redden
and the smoke-sharp light of dawn will mutter
the fire's freshness in the plaster
and black beams: thus the laudatory hand
of matin bells will seep into the bodies,
flame-and-dew, of young Friulan boys.

And, from a racing train, down on the Livenza—
a boy will appear on the emerald edge,
from the Veneto, modest as the dawn, his hand
on his pants, clear and pink against the green. . . .
And the night of Holy Thursday in Casarsa?
Children, pealing, tumbling out of church,
by the black brook rim will strike their pyro-
technic tinders, threads of almost-summer light. . . .

On the Stella at Palazzolo, in flight-
yellowed aviaries, children, spring-threads
in their fingers, will wait for goldfinch
to come singing from Carpazi; and from
evening schools at Pordenone, in the smooth
refulgence of the sun dying on the asphalt,
young boys, moved by a subtle Spirit,
will pedal lightly on their bikes toward
homes buried among willow trees and elders.

At Trieste, carried off by happy hearts,
heads burnished by the Adriatic sun,
youths will soar on the quay with their oars;
and by the Isonzo's asphalt junctions
pointed toward the sea or Europe's breast,
adolescent troops from Palmanova or Gradisca
will be singing, fresh with Sunday fire,
gullets open wide like porches.

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Among the cockles and the piers of Ponte Vecchio
white-breasted, pre-pubescent boys will watch
the shadowed Arno hallucinate with lights,
and Roman lads will leap from spans into a Tiber
tawny with cupolas and arches, and at Scandiano,
sharp in pastel coats, students will scramble
clamorously on trains, and at Cremona
grammar schoolers will scamper toward the Po
radiating in the sun burning the last snow,
and at Venice the young gondolier, aureoled
in palpitating hair and leaning on his oar,
will smile, bemused, at the morning tide.

The feastday will return to Teglio
and the celebrant young will hang the lamps
above the platform and the benches, on the poles,
in the Saturday air wounded by expectant voices;
the feastday eve will come, delirious with lights
on little bridges and low walls where they,
the tender-aged, embraced, will watch the dance
of the young, who coruscate like poplars.

Sunday night will come again to Sesto
and, burned by the red of sweaters,
impatiently embracing their shy companions,
they will laugh in the light's reflections;
some will lie low in the moviehouse shadow,
not daring to brush the scorching beam
with their silken cheeks, and some will cut
across the arduous zone with a sudden flash.

To Cordovado, Ramuscello, Gleris
a Sunday morning in spring will come again!
And on the dust of the road, by ditches
where the rose-green ducks gleam in the sun,
young boys dressed in mothers' smocks,
hair combed to the sound of bells,
will head for mass, arm-in-arm, charming the wind,
barely alive in the willows and violets.

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Ex Vita

In a filmy stench of slaughterhouse
I see the image of my body, half-naked,
ignored, almost dead. This is the way,
since childhood—already then my love's
automaton—I've wanted to be crucified,
with a flash of tender horror.
But behind this mist of marrow
(how many years or centuries fixed here?),
o Individual, o Second Self,
you find you're made of me, my heat,
and hostile to a death anterior to mine.

I come to you from an intoxicating voyage.
I touched, in light-struck days,
the blackened walls and dew-damp grasses
of Casarsa, offered, with a warrior's
casual grace, my naked body to the Po's,
the Meschio's, the Livenza's fresh,
most ancient, languid time, played
on the verge of a reaching plain,
on burning meadows, under endless skies,
in houses basking in the rainbow-womb
of a thousand aromas, tender, rarified.

And I come into your circle, bitter,
fresh as my mother at evening, crossing
the threshold, jeweled in dry grasses,
and I bring with me a wind of countrysides,
a stately nimbleness, a stranger's candid
courage. And you exude only silence.
O, complete unknown that you once were,
the boy lost in the house, the young bourgeois
who nourished the loved heart's spurious
loves, now you're nothing,
THE NOTHING, pure error.

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This is how, o famished, o obscure desire,
with a look out of pre-human ages,
you express your maniac life.
The world's life is your mania.
From me you only want what corresponds
to your mad toil at self-annihilation.
You ignore my century's every attraction,
every holiday, every passion learned
in the years of a self-inspired life.
You refuse to see that eternity, in time,
offers itself in nearly eternal feasts.

But you ignore as well even more essential games:
confessing the male's desires,
the love for my mother, whom YOU loved,
light that stagnates deep in childhood's
night. . . . (O final candor of this,
my self-exposure. And you don't know it.)
I loved only whom you hated.
I immortalized my young man's shadow
so that, avid, I might mourn its
hope-replete affections, its lily's ardors
that inflamed my filial flesh.

For you, in a desert of serenity,
I dishonor the poor secret of my sex,
and, unheedingly, confess it.
I don't know by what calm and ultimately
honest miracle—out of my neuroses
I evoke pure skies, odorless places
in which, Matter of Death, you die.
Yes, often you've died, and the boy
returns happy to the womb, and the eager
mythomaniac to the gentlest form,
though nothing is left but his life.

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But you, in the depths of time, await me,
here inside, where a languid stench
of moss or excrement infects muscles
and stomach; and, while the naked black
of a stairwell or a nomads' bivouac thickens,
I see you, mummy, automaton, and you see me.
O mortal nostalgia for one who did not
know you and who, o pure Living One,
not knowing your orangutang's anxieties,
vanished with his happy fate,
unknown heart in an unknown world.

—translated from the Italian
by Dino Fabris

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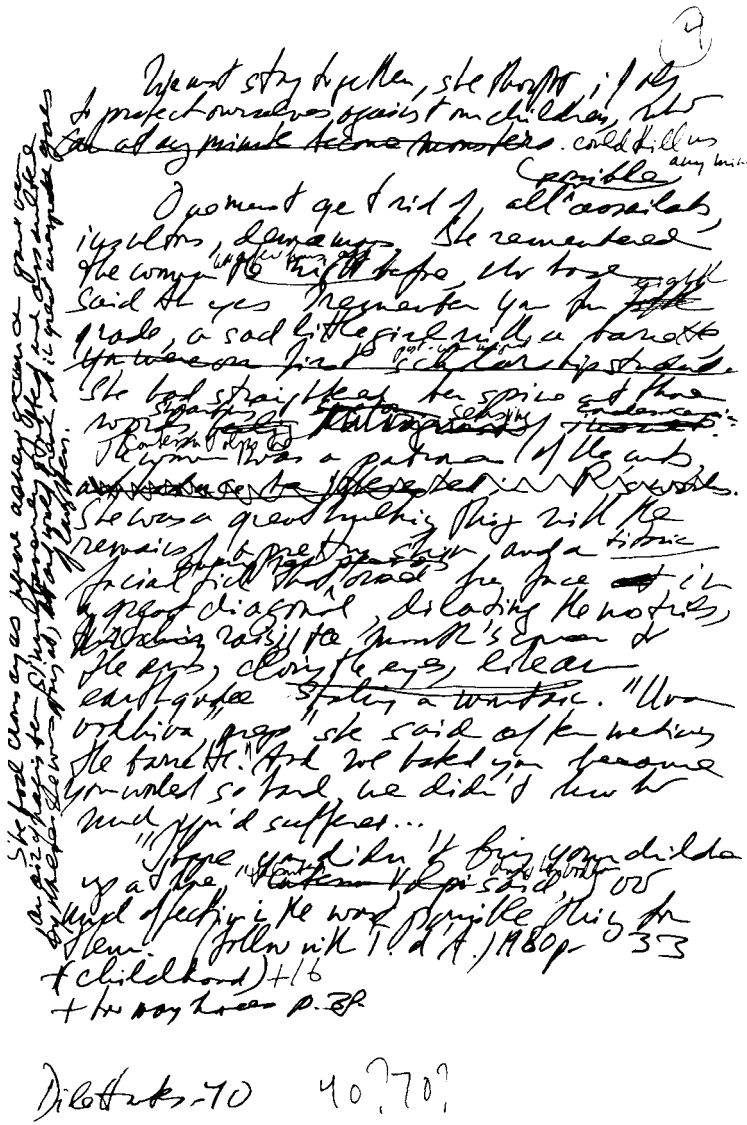

A manuscript page from Francine du Plessix Gray's current work in progress, entitled The Garden.

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The Art of Fiction XCVI
Francine du Plessix Gray

I first met Francine du Plessix Gray in Morocco in 1983. Gray had interrupted the completion of her third novel, October Blood, *and was en route to Paris to finish her articles about Gestapo chief Klaus Barbie and the French Resistance, which would appear in* Vanity Fair *that fall and for which she would receive the National Magazine Award for Best Reporting.*

Gray was born in the French Embassy of Warsaw in 1930 where her father, a specialist in Slavic languages, was a member of the French diplomatic corps. After he died in

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1940, his plane shot down by Fascist artillery, she and her mother emigrated to America and her mother married Alexander Liberman. Her mother was a noted hat designer and her stepfather is the painter, sculptor and editorial director of Condé Nast. Francine du Plessix attended the Spence School, Bryn Mawr, and two summer sessions at Black Mountain College and graduated from Barnard where she majored in philosophy. She was the only woman on the nightshift at United Press International for two years and was a fashion reporter in Paris. In 1957, she married painter Cleve Gray and later had two sons, Thaddeus, now a banker, and Luke, now an artist. For the first years of her marriage she painted, a vocation for which she had had a yearning since childhood. She returned to writing by doing art criticism for Art in America, *where she was book editor in 1964; and in 1965, she began to contribute fiction and political essays to* The New Yorker. *Her first two books were nonfiction:* Divine Disobedience: Profiles in Catholic Radicalism *(1970), for which she won a National Catholic Book Award, followed by* Hawaii: The Sugar-Coated Fortress *(1972). Three novels followed:* Lovers and Tyrants *(1976),* World Without End *(1981), and* October Blood *(1985). Her new collection of essays,* Adam & Eve and the City *(1987), displays her keen observations of the political, literary, and domestic scene. Gray has taught at the College of the City of New York, Yale University, Columbia University, and Princeton University, and was Writer-in-Residence at the American Academy in Rome.*

We began the interview at her home in Warren, Connecticut, a town so small it does not have its own post office. So much of her time is spent traveling, she has found this remote area of New England a perfect refuge from urban and social distractions, and a fine place for work. We met in winter, a week before Christmas. Pushkin and Sabaka, companion standard poodles, accompanied us on a tour of the stone farmhouse: huge hearths, a labyrinth of small, dark eighteenth century rooms alternating with lighter, newer spaces, walls lined with bookcases and contemporary paintings. The tiny bedroom where she spends her early morning hours reading

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is painted a dark green. By contrast, her study, a barn that used to be Cleve's studio, is airy and white. It is furnished with an IBM word processor, and such varied classics as St. Augustine's Confessions, Finnegans Wake, *the complete works of Samuel Beckett and of Roland Barthes,* The Perfectibility of Man in Christian Thought *and E. R. Dodds'* The Greeks and the Irrational. *Postcards of particularly beloved paintings—by Titian, Piero della Francesca, Caspar David Friedrich—are tacked to the bookcases above her desk.*

We paused only for dinner by the fireplace of the Grays' living room, and lunch in an historic nearby town; most of our day and a half talk took place in Francine's study where she sat in front of a picture window. Dressed casually in somber-hued slacks and sweater, she could be taken for a one-time fashion model: tall, elegant, fine-boned, with intensely intelligent and aristocratic features; her manner is warm, friendly, and gracious. On one occasion she wore glasses and took notes as we spoke, wishing to make her remarks as thorough as possible. The following morning she was up early, carefully expanding upon statements made the evening before. Her accent and intonations are still distinctly European. "How odious!" she might exclaim, or "Formidable!"

Gray honed my edited version of the transcripts of our conversation on her word processor, condensing the lengthy original. We made our final changes just before the publication of her collection of essays, Adam & Eve and the City.

INTERVIEWER

If you had another life to live, would you choose to be a writer again?

FRANCINE DU PLESSIX GRAY

Hell no. Have you ever met a writer who'd want the same karma a second time round? I doubt if one exists. We write out of revenge against reality, to dream and enter the lives of others. The next time round I'd like to be a great athlete with a political mission, like Billie Jean King or Arthur Ashe, or perhaps a lieder singer. However if you'd confine me to a liter-

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ary trade for another life, I might like to be a sane poet, as long as I could be sure to be very, very sane. Poetry was my first and greatest love, my gate to literature. Long before I knew I'd be a writer, I memorized the whole of Milton's "Lycidas" by heart, or all 300 lines of Valéry's *Cimetière Marin.* A need to stay in touch with sumptuous verbal cadences, internalize the glory of language. To this day the first aspect of prose that grabs me, as a reader, is its tonal texture, its musicality. Prose is only as good as its approximation of the condition of poetry—that condition in which not a rhythm, not a particle of sound can be changed without upsetting the entire page.

INTERVIEWER

Yet poetry is one of the few genres in which you haven't published.

GRAY

A secret vice, probably inherited from my remarkable mother. As a girl during the Russian Revolution, she helped to keep her family alive by reciting poetry to Soviet soldiers in exchange for hunks of bread. To this day, in her late seventies, she has a phenomenal memory for verse, and can recite hundreds of lines of Pushkin, Lermontov, Akhmatova by heart. Her love for poetry has colored my life, and may have made me a writer.

INTERVIEWER

You've worked in a great variety of genres. Has any one form been particularly helpful to your general progress as a writer—fiction, essay, criticism, journalism?

GRAY

Well, I think I needed the discipline of journalism more than many other writers because I've always had a terrifically painful ambivalence of love and terror towards the act of writing. So being forced at the age of twenty-two to sit at a typewriter on the night shift of United Press and turn out radio

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stories in a matter of minutes—sometimes a matter of seconds, since we were always trying to beat AP to the radio wire—this took some of the fear away. Like five percent. That was 1953; another decade passed before I dared to submit any sample of *personal* writing for publication. The sample was "The Governess," which *The New Yorker* bought in 1963, and served as a green light to Go Ahead. I'd written its first version in my senior year at Barnard, ten years before. In 1975, twenty years after that first college version, twelve years after it was published in *The New Yorker,* it became the first chapter of my first novel, *Lovers and Tyrants*. So—an elephantine gestation for fiction, with all the terror this length of time implies.

INTERVIEWER

Could you explore some of the roots of that terror?

GRAY

One childhood episode stands out as particularly vivid, in Paris, in the 1930s. My father was an eccentric, extremely conservative Frenchman who deplored most aspects of the twentieth century, particularly the laxness of its education. And according to his wishes, I spent my first nine years confined to my room, tutored at home by a governess quite as tyrannical as my father. She was a rabid hypochondriac, convinced that the mere *sight* of another child might lead me to catch some deadly germ . . . I lived in extreme isolation. Once a week we commuted to a correspondence school where I'd receive the assignments for the following week—typically French, didactic, desiccating assignments, memorizing Latin verbs and the dates of battles won by Napoleon. But when I was eight years old an unprecedented event took place—a new teacher came in and gave us the following assignment: "Write a Story About Anything You Wish." I was filled with excitement and anguish by this novel freedom. I began as a severe minimalist. Here's the cautionary tale I wrote: "The little girl was forbidden by her parents to walk alone to the lake at the other end of the green lawn. But she wished to visit a green-eyed frog who could offer her the key to freedom. One day she disobeyed her

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parents and walked to the lake, and was immediately drowned. The End." The following day, during his daily visit to the study room my father perused the composition and raised a storm. "Pathetic dribble! You dare call that a story? What will become of you if you don't ever finish anything!" And he grabbed the paper from my little desk and tore it to shreds. It was a May evening in 1939, fourteen months before he died in the Resistance. My father had been the love of my life, and he'd warned me that I should never write again. I didn't attempt fiction again for over thirty years.

INTERVIEWER

Yet when you came to the United States as a child, in the 1940s, didn't you immediately excel in English literature?

GRAY

Ah yes, but solely as a critic and journalist. I arrived at the age of ten not speaking a word of English and I did learn it very fast—I won the Spence School spelling bee just fourteen months later. Throughout high school I was an accomplished essayist and reporter, always editing the school paper, and when I went up to Bryn Mawr I came in second in the freshman essay contest with a study of Rilke's *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge.* Throughout college I barely took one literature course beyond freshman English. It seemed too easy. I'm an explorer, I preferred getting C's in physics or B's in seminars on Kant or on medieval theology; nothing short of St. Thomas seemed much fun. Throughout my first two years of college I'd aspired to be a medievalist. When I transferred to Barnard an extraordinary philosophy professor, John Smith, converted me to the nineteenth century. Yet while writing my senior thesis on Kierkegaard something inspired me to enter a writing contest, and I wrote three little autobiographical texts about my childhood in Paris, and won something called the Putman Creative Writing Award, and with the prize money I bought a third-hand Plymouth and went down to New Orleans for the summer with a band of jazz musicians. I didn't do much else

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but hang out and listen to George Lewis and drink a lot of bourbon.

INTERVIEWER

The college writing prize didn't encourage you to write yet?

GRAY

No, I didn't experience it as terror at the time, simply as dalliance, procrastination. Saint Augustine said "Give me chastity and continence, but not quite yet." I needed to do something iconoclastic, and perhaps I sensed that my writing was too staid at the time to satisfy me. Time Inc. had come to Barnard recruiting earlier that year and offered me a job but I sure wasn't ready for anything as staid as that. I was very much of a tomboy, and also under the spell of the budding Beat Generation. At United Press I was the only woman on the graveyard shift—midnight to eight AM—which partly satisfied my needs for a counterculture. And in the following decade, before I "became a writer," I worked as a journalist in Paris, and when I returned to the United States and married I painted for eight years. I'd had an early gift for drawing; it took me much probing, until my mid-thirties, to choose between painting and writing and several other aspirations. So, to answer your original question: my deepest affinities lie at the very opposite pole from journalism, in dense, subjective, meditative texts; fiction has been a very late vocation, and most painful in execution, though paradoxically the days when I'm writing fiction are quite the happiest days of my life. Yet the practice of journalism has allayed the terror I felt towards the act of writing, it's been a great source of reassurance, the only kind of writing I knew I could always do very well.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel you're a better journalist than novelist?

GRAY

I don't know what that means, because I look on my work

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as a total entity, with each form influencing the others. Even if nonfiction of the kind I've published in *Adam & Eve and the City* is my best form, it's because I have the discipline of observing life in a novelistic way—listening to the nuances in people's conversations, observing the flower here, and everywhere the crooked little edge of lace. It's the capacity to observe such details that differentiates a terrific first-rate journalist like Pete Hamill, say, from great lyrical nonfiction writers like Joan Didion or George Orwell.

INTERVIEWER

You're an avid journal-keeper.

GRAY

Yes, here they are on the shelf, twenty-five years and forty volumes of them.

INTERVIEWER

Spiral notebooks, like high school students'. Do you keep them with any regularity?

GRAY

Until ten years ago I'd feel wretched if I didn't write in them every day. Recently the compulsion has been less intense, a week or two can go by and then I catch up in my big streak: angers and anxieties and sarcastic reports on overhead conversations, any snazzy metaphors that come to mind, phrases and ideas for current projects, a lot of nature notes—smells, sounds, colors, birds. I sometimes wonder *why* I have to look back and record precisely what I was experiencing on such and such a day. No one's given a satisfactory explanation for this compulsion writers have to keep a laundry list of the soul: Virginia Woolf, her need to jot down who came to tea every day, and the pitch of Lytton Strachey's voice and the kind of cucumber sandwiches she served. It's as if we feel constantly other from the person we were the day, the hour before, and this sense of flux is terrifying, we have to crystallize, fix every mo-

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ment of ourselves in order not to disappear altogether, as if our very identity were constantly threatened with dissolution.

INTERVIEWER

How is imagination linked to this process of "fixing" reality in journals?

GRAY

It's a way of keeping the imagination fed, of storing sensory data in hope that it'll eventually kindle, fire the imagination. Even more basic: the daily discipline of verbalizing all sensory data greatly sharpens the sensations received. One of my more terrifying gurus, Charles Olson of Black Mountain, used to compare journal-keeping to the process of sharpening a pencil. Our emotions, and, one hopes, the power of our inspirations and of their expression, are kept at maximum clarity and intensity by the daily routine of being inserted into the sharpening edge of the journal.

INTERVIEWER

What's the balance of reality and imagination in your fiction?

GRAY

Lovers and Tyrants is very "real" in the sense that it traces the course of a woman's life in many ways akin to my own. Yet *World Without End* is in many ways more autobiographical because its protagonist, Edmund, with his hangups about his impoverished European ancestry, his envy of the American WASP milieu he's thrust into as an immigrant child, his aspirations for an academic career, is much more my alter ego than Stephanie ever was—my greatest ambition, when still in college, was to do a lot of doctorates, as Edmund did, and become a college prof, though I would have opted for philosophy, theology. As for *October Blood*: it's set in the tyrannical frivolity of the New York fashion world in which my mother and stepfather made their living, but its characters are as

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fictional as can be, perhaps too fictional for my comfort. I see all that as an absolutely average, normal dosing of life into fiction. We ain't got but one life to work with, and we all squeeze it dry before we're through.

INTERVIEWER

I'm only posing the autobiographical question because you've often stated the impact of psychoanalysis on your work, and the way it enabled you to finish your first novel, *Lovers and Tyrants.*

GRAY

I'm said to be a very gifted analysand. No restraints, no self-consciousness, little *pudeur*, it all spouts out with volcanic, Slavic candor. I can accomplish in eighteen months of analysis what it would take most other persons five years. Doctors weep and mourn after we part, keep tabs on me for years to come, as if they don't want to lose touch with this phenomenal fount of candor. And yet I have considerable scruples and great control over what I want to reveal in my writing. In real life, off the couch or off the page, I'm a very private, rather secretive person. There are numerous anguishes I don't reveal to my husband or children or closest friends. I'm a great keeper of secrets, both other people's and my own. Perhaps that's why I need a journal as a confessional release.

INTERVIEWER

What precisely was the relationship between your psychoanalysis and the progress of your fiction?

GRAY

It forced me to acknowledge the fact of my father's death, thirty years after the fact, and it literally allowed me to become a novelist. In the middle of my analysis, in 1974, I was motivated for the first time to visit my father's grave, in the family chapel near Nantes. And when I returned I wrote the last three chapters of *Lovers and Tyrants* in some six months—a book

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whose first chapter I'd drafted twenty-three years previously, in college!

INTERVIEWER

Are there any other anxieties which inhibit or motivate your writing?

GRAY

Over the years I've come to realize that my greatest fear in life is a dread of a certain kind of solitude, of abandonment. And I've come to know that by writing I'm creating a presence which fills that solitude, which takes the place of some ideal Other. Mind you, I'm not afraid of any *chosen* solitude—I'm fiercely independent, I love traveling alone, going to restaurants and theater alone—I'm only terrified of abandonment. This is rooted certainly in the evenings of my childhood. Night was a very threatening time. I don't remember having one single dinner with my parents during all of my childhood in Paris. They were each off in a different direction every night, and there I was in the dark apartment alone with this terrifying predatory governess who I felt was always ready to ravage, destroy me. So the act of writing—I'm dealing with the most primitive, elemental fears here—the act of writing, this creation of a *controllable* presence, seems to be a mature way of exorcising the fear of abandonment, the dread of annihilation which filled my early years. The text in progress is like a fire in the room, an animal, it speaks, hollers, barks, growls back at me, like a magical dog guarding my body from evils, guarding me against the threat of void, of extinction.

INTERVIEWER

Wouldn't this defy the French semiologists who see writing as "absence" rather than presence?

GRAY

That's an interesting issue. They're referring to the gap between the signified and the signifier, to the difference between

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the rich fullness of experienced emotion and the relative poverty of the scripted text. This discrepancy has haunted most great writers from Plato on. St. Augustine, Rousseau, Roland Barthes have expressed it very poignantly. According to them the written sign might indeed be seen as "absence," in the sense that it is a weak replacement for the buzzing blooming richness of the signified emotion. But one can't always reconcile semiotics—abstract theories of signification—with the existential, talismanic quality of the written speech act. Rousseau made the point that writing becomes necessary when speech fails to protect our identity. The written word may be a weak second best to lived experience, but it's still pretty powerful—our only path to meaning and inner order. I keep being haunted by this phrase of Valéry's: "I thought to erect a minor monument of language on the menacing shore of the ocean of gibberish."

INTERVIEWER

Which brings more "inner order," fiction or nonfiction?

GRAY

Oh, fiction is a much mightier, more capable watchdog against the threat of inner disorder, of gibberish. I've given some thought to this, because I've a few friends who try to flatter me out of writing novels by saying "dozens of people around can do that better than you, so why not stick to nonfiction since very few writers can do it as well as you; you could be the John Gunther of your generation, blah-blah." And so I've had to analyze why I'm impelled to go on writing novels, and I know it's because even at the beginning of a fictional text, when it's no more than a vapor, a perfume in my head, there's a whole world hovering by me, a most protective and consoling presence. Whereas in months when I'm only writing reportages, when I have no ideas for fiction, it's like returning to the dreaded dark rooms of my childhood evenings, it's like every close friend is out of town and there's no one to talk to. Then another important difference between the two genres: fiction is so autoerotic! That's why we all want to keep on doing

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it. By that I mean, you keep *surprising* yourself to a degree you can't ever surprise yourself in nonfiction, and surprise is the most basic element of any erotic experience. Still another difference: you'd think that one learns more about "the world," or "reality," by writing nonfiction, but that's wrong.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

GRAY

One learns much more by writing fiction, because the insights come from those deeper subconscious levels where the greater and more interesting truths lie. Aristotle put it this way in his *Poetics:* Poetry is more philosophical than history. And the word "philosophical" meant considerably more in Aristotle's time than it does in ours, it meant more "true" and more "real" in the deepest possible sense of those words. I'd agree with that, I'd say that history opens us to the *possible*, whereas fiction, by opening us to the unreal, leads us to what is *essential* in reality. Mind you, this doesn't mean that fiction is a higher, more noble genre. The quality of any literary text depends on formal rather than referential values. Nonfiction—think of Gibbon's, Montaigne's, Baudelaire's prose—can produce works of art as great as any novel. I'm merely answering your question, comparing the shamanistic and educational aspects of different literary forms as I've experienced them.

INTERVIEWER

Can you cite instances of your fiction in which you learned more about yourself than in writing autobiography, or more about "the world" than in writing reportage?

GRAY

Oh sure, all the time. While writing *World Without End*, for instance, and coursing through the life of its protagonist, Edmund, who begins as a painter and then spends twenty years as an art historian, I learned the extent to which I myself

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was torn between the vocation of painting and of writing, the extent to which I'm still more drawn to the company of visual artists than to that of writers. I was a good painter, and it was a hard choice, at least a decade in the making, but it was a division in myself which I'd never previously admitted to in any autobiographical essay, not even in a journal entry. Or else, for instance, in writing *October Blood*: I realized more powerfully than I could have through reading or writing dozens of essays on that theme, the awesomely powerful hold most mothers have over their daughters, that "choreography of guilt and love" most mothers and daughters must perform to emancipate themselves from each other and attain a measure of peace. Well, one last example: If I wished to know more than I do about my own mother, who is a most private and uncommunicative person, I'd learn more by writing a *novel* about her than by doing a memoir. No amount of research about her, of reading through her correspondence, would let me discover as much as I'd discover through writing a novel; for much of my real knowledge of her lies buried inside me, in those subliminal levels which can only be tapped by poetry or fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Tell me how you work.

GRAY

I get up fairly early and have an overabundant physical energy in the early hours, even without caffeine, which I gave up decades ago. I'm rather like a hyperactive child in the morning, it's very hard for me to sit still and concentrate on any writing then. So those hours are reserved for the more passive work—reading what I call my sacred texts, poetry or the Bible or the classics; recently I've gone through Lattimore's translation of Homer, and Virgil's *Aeneid* in the Fitzgerald translation, and a history of the Kabbalah. Then after this most treasured hour of the day which I always spend alone upstairs in my room, with some tea and fruit and honey, I go about the business of life—notes to friends, shopping and planning for

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the family, answering phone calls, thanking people for this and that, thanking the world—as if I have to earn the right to write by being a good girl, all about me must be perfectly rinsed and dusted before I can start working. That's in part due to my great fear of interruptions, but even more to an excessive proclivity to order and neatness which prevails in my mother's family. Compulsive Slavic hospitality, and a tedious dutifulness and domesticity, are probably my most time-consuming vices.

INTERVIEWER

What happens if all the rinsing and dusting—women's work, in effect—takes up your whole day?

GRAY

I'm so punctual that it doesn't happen too often, and when it does I'm quite philosophical about it. I've always chosen life above art, quite passionately so. That great story of James, "The Lesson of the Master," if I'd been its protagonist I would have grabbed the girl and run with the good juicy life, with no qualms whatsoever. I have no sense of my writing or *anyone's* writing being permanent. I was too steeped in war and death in my early years, too affected by the Holocaust, to have any veneration of art—after all the single most literate and art-revering nation in the world, Germany, was responsible for the greatest horror in human history. I'm also very pessimistic about the fate of the planet; since I fear we're all doomed to extinction in the next century I feel much more greedy about cultivating compassion, harmony with my surroundings, maintaining close, loving ties with my family and friends. So my two ruling maxims are the following: the old Jewish proverb, "Live every day as if it were the last day of your life," which means we must constantly, from a fairly early age, prepare ourselves for exiting in a state of utmost serenity and order, both physical and spiritual. Maxim two: Compassion Is Not Freaking Out. So those times when I live the whole day as if it were the last, simply putting order in the garden of life, I don't freak out, and have little understanding of people who do.

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INTERVIEWER

But let's take a day when you're finished with chores by mid-morning.

GRAY

I like to get to this studio a little before eleven, ideally, and stay here until six thirty or seven. Three to seven PM, that's when the best ideas come, and if I started at nine AM my back would never hold up until four PM—I've had severe back problems, like many writers, and in my case only exercise brings relief. So during the six or seven hours I spend in this room I like to take an athletic break—yoga, swimming forty laps, a few sets of tennis singles or a two-mile walk, depending on the season. And in summer there's my beloved vegetable garden to weed and pick and freeze from. Mind you, during the time I sit here very little "writing" goes on—I write first draft by hand, on yellow legal pad, before putting it into my terrific new IBM computer. I write very impulsively, so terribly fast only I can decipher my scrawl. But only one quarter of this first outpouring, at the most, is usable, so actually, I work very slowly. It's mostly pacing, researching, brewing endless cups of herb tea while I think of how to annotate these terrible earlier drafts. Hours are spent figuring how to rewrite one single sentence—I've never managed to write anything, even a book review, in fewer than three or four drafts. Again, the most important aspect of coming to this room for several hours a day is a talismanic one—it's here, for the past twenty years, by creating a presence of words alongside me, that I've slowly become something I can begin to call myself, and traveled away from that "ocean of gibberish" which menaces us throughout life.

INTERVIEWER

You're able to write fiction and nonfiction almost simultaneously. For instance, most of the essays and reporting collected in *Adam & Eve and the City*—five hundred pages of them—were written while you were at work on one of your

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novels. And you must have taken off six months to do the pieces on Klaus Barbie alone. How do you juggle acts like that?

GRAY

No great problem. I'm a very political animal, and the historical moment can be more compelling to me than any fictional task. Any one of my novels was delayable; Barbie was not. I knew I could write about him in a way very few Americans could because I had a very intimate link with the theme—the role of the Vichy government in the extermination of French Jews.

INTERVIEWER

What stops you from taking a story like Klaus Barbie's and creating a novel about it?

GRAY

I've read enough about the Holocaust to know that only two truly great novels have been written about it—Schwarz-Bart's *The Last of the Just* and *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* by Tadeusz Borowski, published in the extraordinary Penguin series of "Writers from the Other Europe" which Philip Roth edited. Anyhow, your very question "Why not write a novel about it?" presupposes a very outmoded division between fiction and nonfiction, a division in part created by odious consumer pressures. I've always played down that division, and looked on every act of writing as pure "text." Isn't that much more liberating?

INTERVIEWER

That's become a trademark of your teaching process, hasn't it?

GRAY

Indeed. Whenever I'm invited to teach "writing" at some university, I refuse to ever use the "fiction" and "nonfiction" labels, and I particularly resist the word "creative" as applied

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to writing—that's the most vulgar of them all. I only agree to one title, "The Writing of the Text," and I only use teaching texts which transcend and defy traditional categories—Flaubert's *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas*, William Gass's *On Being Blue*, Fitzgerald's *The Crackup*, Peter Handke's *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*. We've been brainwashed by the myth that fiction and poetry are more "creative" than criticism or reportage, a strictly American hang-up exploited by our universities to plug their seedy little Creative Writing departments, a notion that makes for very bad literature. Look at masterpieces like Max Frisch's *Sketchbooks*, or James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, or Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, texts that defy most classifications and are as considerable works of art as any novel published in the West in the past years.

INTERVIEWER

Well this hierarchy of genres you're fighting, this tagging and labeling, has much to do with the marketing aspect of contemporary literature, doesn't it?

GRAY

It sure does. And it's worth discussing, because it has to do with issues of power, with the audience's need to control the writer. Naming, labeling, pegging, tagging will always increase the audience's sense that it can control if not curb the writer. Just the way our readers constantly want us to repeat and write more of the kind of text which has pleased them in the past, whenever we strike out into a totally different direction, from sentimental liberal feminism to black satiric humor for instance, they're disappointed because they want us to continue giving them more of the same. They're terrified that some subversive, abrasive new aspect of any writer's sensibility will disturb that philistine bourgeois experience, the reader's *pleasure.*

INTERVIEWER

Which means that if we want to write a first book that might

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have a chance of being published we ought to mimic Stephen King.

GRAY

Oh sure, there are twenty thousand people all over the country trying to mimic Stephen King. I'm not certain it's that easy. I have a fair gift for satire, but however hard I tried I couldn't write a Jacqueline Susann beyond a page of pastiche. I'd love to make that money but I can't.

INTERVIEWER

What would you do with that kind of money if you ever made it?

GRAY

I'd give many birthday parties for friends I love—in pretty restaurants, so as to consume less of my working time. And I'd take masses of lessons, all kinds of lessons, Hebrew lessons, singing lessons, how-to-swim-an-impeccable-crawl lessons, more tennis lessons. My sons always teased, saying if mom ever made money we'd never see the end of lessons. I'm the most perennial student you'll ever meet. Learning any new discipline—a new language, a new sport, a new philosophy—is as perfect a joy as any I know.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned your love for satire, and that makes me return to your last novel, *October Blood*. There's so much rich satire there. Is that the only way you could handle that material without diminishing it?

GRAY

Any novel about the world of fashion must remain on the satiric level, because most people in that world are themselves in a constant state of self-satire, self-imitation. When the editors shout "Give me more fans, more wind, I want her hair all the way out to Outer Mongolia," I bet they're in good part saying that for hype, as an attention-getter. And they say it with

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all the terror and anxiety actors feel, they're constantly on stage, on parade and display. So in a novel dealing with such persons we're working at a double remove, parodying characters who in real life parody themselves.

INTERVIEWER

What particular difficulties did that "double remove" pose?

GRAY

It exposed the problematic relationship between character and dialogue. The kind of personae I was working with reveal themselves early on through dialogue, through their outrageous way of using language. So the first building tools I had were a rich set of lines—"Civilization is built on endless, glorious *waste*"—and my first drafts I was working *from* dialogue *back* to character. That can be the proper process for nonfiction—in reportage of the kind collected in *Adam & Eve and the City*, the pieces on the Vietnam years, on the Moonies cult, character is mostly revealed by dialogue; but for fiction this direction is often wrong, it creates a very flat, two-dimensional texture. It's as if I'd sculpted them "in the round." As any artist knows, that can't be done. You have to start all over again!

INTERVIEWER

Was that the central problem in that particular novel?

GRAY

Not exactly. The most important lesson I learned from *October Blood* is that in any decent writing one must observe with cruelty, describe with cruelty, yet end up with some sense of mercy. The fashion plate women I was dealing with lend themselves so readily to parody and pastiche that it was subtle and difficult to express my empathy for them—which I do have, for their world is anything but evil. Evil comes from those who lay claim to extreme goodness, like leaders of nations, doctors, lawyers. Only an angel could have fallen as low

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as Satan fell. The world of fashion had no pretensions whatever to goodness or justice, it's mostly about dressing up dolly, it's about kindergarten. Moreover its denizens are often anxious, suffering persons, people who're terrified that they're suddenly going to cease existing if they're not constantly seen in their frippery. But instead of turning to writing as you and I do to allay that dread of non-identity, of extinction, they have to feel perpetually observed, it's their only way of making sure they won't—poof!—suddenly disappear altogether.

INTERVIEWER

At the end of *October Blood* I did sense that you have empathy with your characters. Does fashion mean much to you?

GRAY

I'm coquettish, which is a little different from being vain or narcissistic. Come to think of it, how many women writers have been style-conscious, fastidious about their get-ups! George Sand, Edith Wharton, Colette, Isak Dinesen . . . how carefully Virginia Woolf chose her tweeds and jerseys! Numerous other writers come to mind, writers deal a great deal in self-image, we can't help but be solicitous about how we project it physically. And don't listen to the kneejerk radical feminists and all their claptrap against the beauty industry, the issue of adornment is a very deep and fascinating one. Look at all the great minds who've given thought to it—Hazlitt, Baudelaire, Levi-Strauss. Did you know that Roland Barthes's very first published book was about fashion? *Systême de la mode*, his densest, most difficult text! But to answer your question: I suffer from a combination of coquetry and thrift. I love good clothes but detest spending money on them. My favorite clothes are gifts from well-off friends who give me their Paris or Seventh Avenue castoffs. I'm keenly aware of the fact that I could have remained in the world of *couture* and chose not to, and that the only time I tried to live in it as an adult, when I was a fashion reporter in Paris in the fifties, it came near to destroying me.

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INTERVIEWER

You ended up with a nervous breakdown?

GRAY

Close to. It began as acute mononucleosis with 105 degree temperature and internal hemorrhages, and the French doctors always say, "You need altitudes!" So I went to high Swiss mountains. I probably should have gone to a sanatorium but the notion depressed me. Instead I went to a little hotel by myself and ended up profoundly depressed, taking a lot of medications and drinking much wine in an attempt to cure my insomnia. In a matter of weeks up there on the mountain I realized that I'd been made ill—mononucleosis is a disease related to high stress—by living a life which was entirely unsuited for me. As I've written somewhere, during those two years in the Paris fashion world I'd been "racing for my mother's love," trying to recreate and relive those values which she had striven for in Paris as a young woman in the 1920s and 30s, when she was fulfilling her own youthful aspirations for the Paris *beau monde.*

INTERVIEWER

Yes, I like that line you used for that situation in *Lovers and Tyrants*: "Fucking goons for mom," a very delicate line. Do you consider yourself an American writer?

GRAY

Technically, yes, I've had an American passport since the age of twenty-one. Yet I've experienced my nationality in a very different way from Jewish-Americans or Puerto Rican or Chinese or Italo-American immigrants. They've all been able to join an ethnic subculture in this country, whereas there was never any French subculture for me to enter. Of all the major nations or cultures in the West, the French have perhaps emigrated less than any other. I never had a *shtetl*, a tribe, any welcoming community as other immigrants had. And a lot of my solitude as a person, much of the search for community which is the prevailing theme of all my work, is due to this

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sense of rootlessness and isolation. So since this nation is a melting pot constantly receiving foreigners, I sure am an American writer. But unlike those other immigrants I've mentioned I'm a loner straddling many different ancient cultures: the French and Russian cultures of my blood lineage, much Celt and Tartar in those strains, the Roman Catholicism of my early years, the Anglo-Saxonness of my later education.

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel that background has affected the diction, the style of your writing?

GRAY

I haven't been aware of honing words more carefully than other writers, but Anne Tyler has written to that effect in reviewing me. We've never met, so it's an objective judgement on the part of a most perceptive critic. I was bilingual in French and Russian until the age of eleven, when I learned English, and I've remained fluent in my first two languages. When you're brought up that way you're keenly aware of all the different syntactical structures any emotion can pour itself into. It's like living with a panoramic screen on which you constantly see inscribed all the different forms any one sentence could take on, and all that voluptuous choice of positions gives you a very erotic, very sensuous contact with the text. By erotic I mean the diverse possibilities and surprises, the luxury of choices. No missionary positions in émigré prose! The great danger is to get *too* voluptuous, lapse into lushness, purpleness.

INTERVIEWER

Might you still borrow specific phrasings from other languages which come off as mistakes in English?

GRAY

Oh yes, and often I'm slow to learn the corrections. I tend to hang on to them as talismans, relying on my husband to correct them. I show him most everything I write before I send

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it off. One instance: It took me forty years—until last year, in fact—to drop the habit of saying "I arrived *to* New York in 1941." I was aping the French syntax, "Je suis arrivée *à* New York." Last year I said to myself, "Let's become a big girl and catch it before Cleve does."

INTERVIEWER

Do you show your writing to anyone other than Cleve before it's published? Any friends?

GRAY

I don't think I showed *Lovers and Tyrants* to anyone beyond Leo Lerman and Joanna Rose, my closest friends since adolescence, who've saved my sanity many a time since I've been eighteen. I showed *World Without End* to a few art historians to be sure all of Edmund's doctoral dissertations on Titian and other matters were all right. I showed *October Blood* to more pals than I'd shown any other texts because there were so many highly specialized issues dealing with frippery to check out—I needed invaluable corrections such as "Balenciaga never used greens, only *reds*." So I was getting increasingly open and less fearful about sharing unpublished texts with dear friends; it was wonderful. But then suddenly when I had a finished manuscript of *Adam & Eve* I didn't show it to anyone beyond my family. It's my most important book but I felt both fatalistic and private about it—twenty years of worrying about the state of the world, bless it, there it went.

INTERVIEWER

The mother-daughter theme recurs in several of the essays in *Adam & Eve*, and all forms of matrilineal legacy recur in your novels. I'm particularly thinking of Babushka, the great-grandmother in *Lovers and Tyrants*. How does that fit in with your general feminist vision?

GRAY

My views of men have grown in some ways more lenient with the years, in some ways much harsher. I'm increasingly ob-

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sessed with the civilizing impact of women in history; as Henry Adams put it, we have "preserved the customs of civility." Throughout the millenia men have gone off to war and left us behind to preserve the tribal memory, to safeguard most social rituals that bond communities together. At times it's even been up to women to purify *language* of the boorish influence brought it by their warrior men. Seventeenth century France, when the women of the salons effected an immense catharsis on the nation's spoken and written speech, is only a case in point. You see, I'm struck by how relatively antisocial men are, compared to women.

INTERVIEWER

They tend to have very few friends!

GRAY

They often think they don't *need* friends, which is always a delusion. And when they do make friends, pathetically few of them are able to bare their hearts. And their self-absorption! Guests come to the house and for hours a man won't even think of offering them a cup of coffee, or he'll stick them into bedrooms with no sheets on the beds or shades on the windows. Some of the most brilliant men I've known are social basket cases, barely able to introduce their sisters to their office colleagues. So that's how the matrilineal theme may have crept into my novels—my sense that much ritual life crucial to civilization has been preserved through the efforts of women, my growing awareness of men's frailty and helplessness, women's greater self-control, versatility, ingenuity. On the other hand, in each of my novels I've moved to an increasingly moderate feminist view according to which women have to take total responsibility for whatever happens to them. We simply can't go on blaming the overbearing men who've attempted to suppress us—the submissive female can be her own worst tyrant. We've *all* got to be like Golda Meir, who ran away from home at age fifteen to finish high school; the fathers in her Jewish community were not allowing their daughters to finish high school, only wanted to prep them for

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marriage, so she split. You've got to split early like Golda or you'll be a goner. My Paula of *October Blood* realized that too late, and I myself barely made it.

INTERVIEWER

Your remarks concerning some men's incivility . . . what old-fashioned stress you put on courtesy, decorum!

GRAY

Oh yes, yes, I'm appallingly old-fashioned in that sense. In part, it's a rebellion against the increasing boorishness that prevails among many of my colleagues, left-wing intellectual jet-setters, if you will, who seldom answer mail or invitations or acknowledge books, who accept teaching positions at universities for lavish fees and appear no more than five times out of the twelve-week term, who swagger into symposiums in their leather duds to amuse the audience by savaging their colleagues' reputation—this crudeness is poisoning the very core of academic life. Many scholars have such chutzpah about their star status that they barely even prepare decent papers anymore, they simply take their money and run after an hour of self-indulgent mumbo-jumbo, and I've seen this at Princeton, Yale.

INTERVIEWER

Is this a characteristic of American intellectuals?

GRAY

Oh not at all. The new academic boorishness is becoming an international disease. The rudest, most uncouth behavior I've seen comes from French scholars. I wouldn't share a cup of tea with such people . . . you know, I was born into relative poverty and a great aristocracy of manners, and I'm faithful to my heritage. Courtesy, punctilio, are more than surface-deep, they're ethical categories which create more charitable bonds between us, refining forces without which we'd never have advanced beyond the Stone Age.

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INTERVIEWER

And your remarks concerning men's infrequent friendships. It strikes me that throughout your books friendship is seen as the very cement of all human relationships: the key essay on friendship in *Adam & Eve*, Father Gregory in *Lovers and Tyrants*, the Platonic bond among the three protagonists in *World Without End*. And in *October Blood*, the childhood bond between Paula and Nicolas seems much stronger than the one she has with her husband, Julian.

GRAY

That simply reflects my own experience. Our lifetime friendships can be more steadfast and trustworthy than any marriage, and considerably more treasurable. Those few persons whom I gained as friends before the age of twenty-five, for example. Nothing they would ever say or do would diminish my love and esteem for them. It's as if they were grafted upon me.

INTERVIEWER

What about a marriage three decades old like yours and Cleve's? Certainly that could only have survived through friendship?

GRAY

But he's an extraordinary man, one of the great spirits of our time. I'm not sure I could have pulled it off with anyone else. It's only after two decades or more of marriage that the truest and most interesting bonding takes place, after you've passed through the marriage's childhood and adolescence. You've been kids together and grown up together, there's so much to recount and recollect, oh, the treasures of shared decades! Then the most fascinating of life's challenges arises, how to infuse new lyricism and imagination into this steady ancient marriage, how to keep it both mystical and erotic through the element of surprise. I repeat that word a great deal and it's a key word to me in all areas of experience—

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surprise is the opposite of the cliche, of the predictable, it's the only remedy against the deadness of the self-evident, whether in love or faith or literature. Ivan Illich once said to me "Faith is a constant readiness for surprise." And why is this phrase of Nabokov's so erotically beautiful? "She came towards me through the cricket-mad dusk of a small train station." "Cricket-mad dusk," language liberated before us into pure surprise.

INTERVIEWER

Yet notwithstanding your unusually happy marriage I sense some bitterness in you about the time-consuming "women's roles."

GRAY

Well I do resent, in my own life and in that of other women, the amount of time we splurge helping and consoling others. Most women seem driven to do this balancing act, however vigorous their careers. Well, I half resent, half accept it. Mind you, I'm not expressing *regret* here when talking about the energy I've lost as a woman; regret is a prissy bourgeois sentiment. I'm *kvetching*, which is a healthy loud-mouthed tribal activity.

INTERVIEWER

Men's lives have been greatly impoverished by their reluctance to nurture.

GRAY

Really? Their writing sure hasn't shown it. Up to now numerous thousands of emotionally paraplegic males, through their mobility and freedom, have been able to infuse their work with much richer political texture than one could ever find in women's literature.

INTERVIEWER

Let's explore the political issue for a while. You've said that the contemporary writers you admire most are those who com-

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bine formal innovation with a very muscular political message, like Salman Rushdie, Milan Kundera, Nadine Gordimer.

GRAY

That's a delicate issue and I must qualify this statement, for there's a sense in which our first political responsibility is to literary form. Only bad writing is unpolitical writing. Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and Cynthia Ozick's *The Cannibal Galaxy* are political novels which deal with the Jewish consciousness of the post-Holocaust era, with ageing, with memory and generations. But they're only made political because they communicate these themes with consummate lyricism and metaphoric depth. Put them into the hand of a commercial hack and they could turn into *I'll Take Manhattan*. Edna O'Brien, Amy Hempel, Deborah Eisenberg, to cite some of the fiction writers whom I've most enjoyed in the past years, write about women with great political power because they constantly search for renewal and freshness in their form and diction. The Sartrian notion of "engaged" political writing has been thoroughly ousted, I would hope. It solely stressed the thematic duty of dealing with "the masses," and without attaining innovative structure and metaphoric power such writing ends up being a replica of the schlockiest social realist fiction being touted by the literary apparatchiks of the Soviet Union . . . the only literature, alas, that this great people has been legally allowed to consume until now.

INTERVIEWER

The issue of religion suffuses all your work. It's central to *Adam & Eve and the City*, and in your novels characters lose their faith, strive to regain it . . . what does that mean to you in real life?

GRAY

I guess I'm always speaking out, through my protagonists, my own dialogue with Him/Her/It out there. As in most areas, unfortunately, I've been very isolated in my dealings with the Church. A Catholic father who was rather cynical

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about religion; my mother, stepfather, husband, my marvelous sons Thaddeus and Luke, all agnostics. As a child I was very attracted by both the Roman and Russian Orthodox Church, very given to meditation. It was my Jewish agnostic stepfather, curiously, who enjoined me to remain a practicing Catholic. He said: "It's extremely important for each of us to have nothing to do for an hour a week but meditate," and that phrase sticks with me. Alex Liberman and his own remarkable father, Simon Liberman, had a more important intellectual impact than anyone else on my adolescence. When I went to Bryn Mawr I started going to Quaker meeting and that greatly deepened my sense of what true religion might be about, it offered a social commitment which Catholicism completely lacked at that time. In my last two years of college, I was heavily into comparative religion, did my senior thesis on Kierkegaard's view of the Death of Christianity—I've had a curious, contradictory need all along to fight and to embrace the faith. I guess I'm a *cultural* Catholic—the Church is a fundamental part of my identity. The day John Kennedy died, when the news broke on the radio the only thing I could do was rush into a church and stay there for many hours on my knees, weeping. I've always retained some close contact with my Catholic roots, if only through a certain practice of meditation. I sense the strength of some vast Presence out there which gave me life and is the ground of my being—which is why I'm so adamantly opposed to suicide. Short of the most dire straits it's a slothful and self-pitying act, but above all our life is not our own to take away! And this Presence . . . I might as well pay homage to it through the rituals of the faith into which I was born, rather than shop around in the cafeteria of the absolute for some more esoteric rite.

INTERVIEWER

But you don't remain "a faithful daughter of the Church"?

GRAY

I don't quite know what that means any more. There's a lot of pruning and selecting to do in Mother Church. We have to

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distinguish the Church-as-She from the Church-as-It—a precious metaphor given me by Ivan Illich. The Church-as-It is that often corrupt bureaucracy which deals out such nonsense as edicts against birth control and divorce, or the marvelous new edict put out some months ago by the Holy Father—get this! We're to be granted indulgences if we watch him on television! Sometimes I think I remain a Catholic because it satisfies my love for the comic, the absurd. The Church-as-She, however, is the eternal message of compassion given us by Christ and Buddha—there's only one truth, and many prophets for it. It's rooted in time and can never be institutionalized. The darn problem is that in order to maintain our contact with that grace we might have to practice some form of communal ritual, for the Spirit only works through community. And liturgy—that complex of architecture, incense, chanting, formalized gestures—serves to alter our consciousness in the most necessary way, to crack it open and lay bare those subconscious levels which alone are receptive to the Numinous. Martin Buber said it so well: "Bad liturgy hides His Face." Which is the case, alas, with most parish liturgy in this country. One must go to the monastic orders—Trappists, Benedictines—to experience revealing liturgy.

INTERVIEWER

Do you believe in a life after death?

GRAY

Oh yes, but again, not in any orthodox terms. I feel that we survive, above all, in whatever acts of compassion we can bring about during our lifetime, that this aggregated mercy, through which we return to the Holy Spirit, is our most precious heritage, that we survive through it in a much more genuine way than we survive through art: a rather Buddhist view which sometimes makes it very hard for me to get to work every morning. Our lives are sacrificial meals to be shared by all, and they're perhaps more sacredly shared through compassion than through art. Few novels are more eloquent on that issue than E. M. Forster's *Howard's End*. Mrs. Wilcox is very much

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of a secular saint; such a person, in real life, might add quite as much or more to a redemptive aggregate of charity as her creator in fiction, Mr. Forster. Much sacredness, goodness and great art is perhaps hidden from us, that's the beauty and mystery of it all.

INTERVIEWER

I see a quotation of T. S. Eliot's pinned above your desk: "Be still and wait without hope/ For hope would be hope for the wrong thing, wait without love/ For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith/ But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting/ . . . So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing." Is that what it's about?

GRAY

"East Coker." Quite. Whatever hopelessness I feel about the issue of art, or grace, or anything of import, I keep in mind that one must retain a quality of very *patient* waiting. It can not be an *anxious* waiting—that would be too acquisitive. Our relationship with the Almighty is much akin to that of the villagers with the Lord on the hill, in Kafka's *The Castle*. He's very whimsical, that One, a big teaser, you never know when he's going to answer your phone call or knock at your door. He's unfathomable and capricious, we must always set an extra place for him at the table, as we do for Elijah at Seder, and during that long wait we must always remain as compassionate with ourselves as we are with others. That was the great sin committed by the hero of *The Castle*, K. He lost his compassion, he freaked out.

INTERVIEWER

Let's return to the issue of contemporary women, and their writing. You've devoted much time, as a critic, to that issue.

GRAY

Where to start! Well. Everyone's wondering why the extraordinary flowering, in our time, of women's *short* fiction, of

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short stories by women. I'll toss out one crazy idea. Women may have been made increasingly aware, by the feminist movement, that their view of things is very *corrective* of the general world view imposed upon us by millenia of male domination. And this sudden confrontation between two fundamentally different visions lends itself particularly well to the short story form; for it functions by way of epiphany, through one sudden revelation, rather than through the gradual revelations which structure novels. If you read the forty or fifty finest short stories written by women in the past century I'd say that this is the overall vision: they seem to be detained in childhood longer, they tend to be presented as terrified misfits, oppressed daughters of sorts. And they come in as messengers bringing warnings, warnings that privileged male authority is not as powerful or secure as it would like to think it is. They come in like ambassadors in chains. I think of Flannery O'Connor's story "Revelation." And most particularly of one by Doris Lessing, "The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange," in which a very smug Afrikaaner planter's wife who's been totally colonized by male authority, never doubted a word her husband had told her, is suddenly confronted by the arrival of an unruly, child-like woman who's come to work on her farm. The child-woman shatters every ounce of Major and Mrs. Gale's white supremacist smugness by teaching them the necessity of anxiety and self-examination, by teaching them that it's not enough to be kind to the blacks, that one must also *identify* with them. So there it is. We remain oppressed daughters with a heavy burden of secret life, and many of our short fictions deal with our epiphanic jolting of an adult world traditionally led by men.

INTERVIEWER

What else makes contemporary women's writing so distinctive, in all its forms?

GRAY

Well paradoxically, I think it's as fine as it is because we still live with a memory of oppression. In a society as permissive, as hedonistic and ego-centered as ours, it might be difficult

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for middle-class white male writers to find the proper medium of resistance, to express that tension between the individual and the social order which has always been the marrow of the best fiction. So much of contemporary American men's writing is mired in sexual hang-ups, in the most self-indulgent male narcissism! Women, on the other hand, however far they've advanced in the past decades, are offered that essential tension by the very memory of submission. And women writers from ethnic minorities—Maxine Hong Kingston, Jamaica Kincaid, Alice Walker—feel that tension with double, triple force. The same comparison holds when you compare current American writing with the extraordinary literature coming out of authoritarian, repressive societies, be it Nadine Gordimer and Athol Fugard in South Africa, or Soviet bloc writers like Solzhenitsyn and Milan Kundera. Many American writers—mostly men, of course—feel this poignantly. The ultimate irony is to hear them say, and I've heard it, "Oh to live in Warsaw, how easy it would be to write good fiction there!" Most perverse! Nostalgia for Fascist-Socialist repression, as the cure for the indolent narcissism of late Capitalist opulence!

INTERVIEWER

But do you feel women still have some way to go to fulfill their potential gifts as writers?

GRAY

Yes, they certainly do. Even in the past two centuries they simply have not created a literature as innovative and revolutionary as men's. Apart, perhaps, from Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein, when have they broken through form as radically as Rimbaud, Apollinaire, Joyce, Borges, Beckett? You see, we still seem to remain stuck, after all these decades of so-called liberation, in our ancient need to seduce, in our damn need for love and approval. Throughout history, seduction and society's approval have been women's only path to survival, and we still may be in deadly fear of losing that esteem and support. In literature and in many other realms, we still

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don't dare take the risks, don't hazard to be as shocking, brutal, abrasive in our writing as men have. We've begun to risk a lot in terms of themes, we've traveled far since the days of *Jane Eyre*, when Charlotte Brontë was judged to be subversive and appalling for describing the particulars of a woman's sexual passion, and of her need for independence. But in the way of revolutionizing the *forms* of literature, our contribution has been most meager. Give me a female Beckett, and then I'll begin to be satisfied.

INTERVIEWER

Do you sense any backlash against "liberated" women in current men's writing?

GRAY

Oh yes, most amusingly so. An exemplary case is a recent fiction of Frederick Barthelme's in which the protagonist's second wife strikes up a very passionate relationship with his first wife and the guy gets ousted from his own house, and ends up in a motel, living on junk food. I suspect there's a paranoia among many men about the very close ties of friendship fostered among women by the feminist movement, a paranoia which goes: Yipes, they're going to turn gay and drive me out of my very bed!

INTERVIEWER

What about the intense new stress on family expressed in your novels and in most other women's writing?

GRAY

That's interesting and very present. Like a few other admirable women's concerns—such as the drive to abolish pornography—it may have its dangers; it risks sharing common ground with the Moral Majority, though in the realm of fiction, the return to the family is above all being expressed in a close scrutiny of matrilineal structures. You find it in Alice Munro, Bobbie Ann Mason, Mary Gordon, Jayne Anne Phil-

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lips, Mona Simpson, the best work. It's amazing how our very titles reveal the theme—*The Company of Women, A Mother and Two Daughters, The Good Mother.*

INTERVIEWER

The search for family—biological *or* synthetic—is at the very root of your work, also.

GRAY

Yes, I'm no exception. And I think we've only seen the tip of the iceberg in this preoccupation with family. It's once again becoming as monumental an obsession as it was in Tolstoy's time. You see, in a society as dehumanized by technology and bureaucracy and media seduction as ours is, as threatened by uncontrollable risks such as that of a nuclear apocalypse, the family is the only traditional human refuge we have. The family is one of the few realities impervious to technology and bureaucratization, the only unit, perhaps, that can't be computerized! As brutally repressive as the family can be, it's the only social medium in which you can still clearly name and define the oppressors, in which you can battle them through discussion or rebellion, or by just plain splitting.

INTERVIEWER

You've written that the first stages of literary feminism expressed a liberation *of* the body, whereas the current stage, what you call "post-feminism," is expressing a liberation *from* the body. Would you explain?

GRAY

Yes, I think there's a striking new chastity, an almost Amazonic retrenchment from the world of men in our current literature which is radically different from the more promiscuous forms of liberation we had to tout in the sixties and seventies. It's most beautifully summed up in a phrase spoken by the protagonist of Mary Gordon's *The Company of Women*: "I don't want to have sex again for another thirty years, it muddles the mind." The current striving is for increased intellec-

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tual clarity, not for a renunciation of sex but certainly for a certain sublimation. Many of us are undergoing a dizzying reversal of roles, what I've called "the Odysseyizing of women, the Penelopizing of men," and yet we seem increasingly in need of returning to traditional family structures, to balance our professions with warm and orderly domestic lives. I find the new chastity in women's letters very healthy, very purging.

INTERVIEWER

How important is teaching to you?

GRAY

Well it's the fulfillment of an ancient Walter Mitty-type dream. As I've said before, to become a college prof was one of my earliest ambitions. But beyond that, it's rather akin to my need for living in deep country. For here's a major point of tension in most writers' lives: How can we rub enough with the world to nourish our writing, while keeping the world enough at bay to safeguard our creative energies? I like living where I do, in southern New England, because I can better control my impulsive, innate gregariousness. It's easier to resist temptations here and yet I can get into New York in two and a half hours, a few times a month, to sample that week's *Zeitgeist*. In a similar manner, teaching offers me a form of human contact which I find deeply satisfying yet less draining than most other social engagements. Listening to students' problems, inciting them to read Plato or Colette, the heatedness and fun of class discussions—that's one of the most nourishing and inspiring things I know. And the sheer boredom of most other traditional social contacts, the literary party circuit in the Hamptons or the Vineyard for instance, could lead me to the loony bin in the space of a weekend. The vapid tiddlywinks conversation, and the tedium of the endless cocktail hours! Cocktails is one American custom I continue to find loathsome; I can't abide dining with anyone who'll make me wait more than twenty-five minutes for dinner. There's a lot of the pedant in me; my idea of a good time is to sit under a tree

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with some close friends over a picnic of bread and cheese and wine and talk about Ficino's influence on Titian's concept of love, or chew over some new insights into William James. Now that's the *greatest* fun. So teaching is something born into me which I love deeply, and it's the form of fraternizing which I find least draining, most inspiring and nourishing. I suppose it also satisfies my great passion for the company of the young, now that my own children are away. If I had another life to relive, I'd ask for better health and a capacity for perfect sleep, so as to have had the energy to work somewhat as I have, and bring up four or five children instead of two. Yes, I so love children that I'd ask for more of them rather than for a more substantial *oeuvre*.

INTERVIEWER

Of the books and writers we've mentioned, which have had the most direct influence on your novels?

GRAY

My very first passion in the way of prose, in my teens, was Dostoyevsky, and I suppose I've retained the religious anxiety. And later, the feminist *bildungsroman* as it evolved through Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*—women striving for identity in a fairly hostile male world—straight on to Mary McCarthy's and Doris Lessing's fiction. That's for theme. In terms of form and structure, I'm not that self-conscious of major influences, many twentieth century texts with voluptuous textures, I guess—Colette, Proust, Nabokov, and the late, lyrical Roland Barthes, his *A Lover's Discourse*, and among my American contemporaries, Elizabeth Hardwick's, Susan Sontag's essays . . . I like a dense, rich verbal texture, I search for language fueled by desire, the desire to recapture the bliss of experience through the energy of the ever-renewed sign. As in Nabokov: "the open window whence the wounded music came."

INTERVIEWER

Any aspects of language you're conscious of struggling against?

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GRAY

Oh God yes, we must all struggle against all that is cautious, already-seen, fatigued, shopworn. I battle against what my admirable colleague William Gass calls "pissless prose," prose that lacks the muscle, the physicality, the gait of a good horse, for pissless prose is bodiless and has no soul. Of course this holds equally true for fiction as for essays, reporting, a letter to a friend, a book review, a decent contribution to art criticism—in sum I search for language in which faith intertwines with desire, faith that we can recapture, with erotic accuracy, that treasured memory or vision which is the object of our desire. I'm keen on the word "voluptuous," a word too seldom heard in this society founded on puritanical principles. I think back to a phrase of Julia Kristeva's, the most interesting feminist thinker of our time, who speaks of "the voluptuousness of family life." I would apply the same phrase to the prose I most admire, prose I can caress and nurture and linger on, diction which is nourished by the deep intimacy of familiar detail, and yet is constantly renewed by the force of the writer's love and fidelity to language.

INTERVIEWER

We haven't talked about one of the most memorable aspects of your writing, humor. Does humor come easily to you?

GRAY

One of the things that led me to write seriously after a decade of procrastination, of dallying with painting and philosophy and art history and journalism, is that I have a gift for very black satiric table talk. I'll readily admit it: like most writers I know, I love being on stage. I've sublimated the dramatic urge by teaching and by making people laugh . . . that black table talk, I'd particularly dole it out to my dear friend Ethel de Croisset, whom I only see twice a year or so because she lives in Paris. And each time I'd see her I'd regale her with many eccentric observations, mimic every acquaintance I'd seen, and one day in the early sixties she said, "You've got to write down all you tell me, I'll be very annoyed if you don't put your comic sense to use." So comedy, social satire, was the first tone I was

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encouraged to by this immensely influential and nurturing friend; my first literary impulse was towards savage, brutal parody, as it stands in the early chapters of *Lovers and Tyrants*—and in some of the political essays in *Adam & Eve and the City*—the girls in the WASP school, the vain French narcissist lover. To this day outrageous black dialogue such as *October Blood*'s, "Only fashion survives wars, pestilence, economic crises," or "I could use a good church service, kneeling is so good for the thighs"—this trivia comes more easily to me than any other passages and such lines are the only ones that never need any editing, that stay in first draft when everything else requires up to *ten* drafts. Which means that somewhere under my veneer of pretty manners and Catholic-Quaker pacifism and sweet domesticity there lurks someone truly violent, mean and savage. If writing is a revenge against reality, humor is the number one revenge *par excellence*, and if I didn't have that outlet I'd probably be knifing people to death, don't you think?

—**Regina Weinreich**

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Pablo Neruda

Ode to the Lizard

On the sand
a
lizard
with a sandy tail.

Beneath
a leaf,
a leaf-like
head.

From what planet,
from what
cold green ember
did you fall?
From the moon?
From frozen space?
Or from
the emerald
did your color
climb the vine?

On a rotting
tree trunk
you are
a living
shoot,
arrow
of its foliage.
On a stone,
you are a stone
with two small, ancient
eyes—
eyes of the stone.

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By the
water
you are
silent, slippery
slime.
To
a fly
you are the dart
of an annihilating dragon.

And to me,
my childhood,

spring
beside
a lazy
river,
that's
you!
lizard,
cold, small
and green;
you are a long-ago
siesta
beside cool waters,
with books unopened.

The water flows and sings.

The sky overhead is a
warm corolla.

—translated from the Spanish
by Margaret Sayers Peden

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Two Poems by Judith Baumel

Thirty-Six Poets

after Sokai Hoitsu

Some are drunk. Some are mumbling.
Many are solitary, each in his way fixed.
They are all happy over their very good number,
an easy square; its root, six,
itself a lovely number, exponential chrysalis.
And if, in the array of patterns
taken from nature—clouds, spider webs, starfish,
we might yet find a true square
not one of these thirty-six, not the one
whose square is on his sleeve or heart, cares.

My old group, my buddies, the Math Team
would measure our drunks by booming
the quadratic formula, gleaming
with rum, slopped over some parents' living room
floor, like these bards in their curtained cabal.
No one of us flubbed our password,
the drinking song, that poem of radicals
pressed in our brains, no gauge at all, absurd.
Minus b plus or minus the square root
of b squared minus four a c over two a.
Now even sober I lose those cancelled lines of youth
and drunk I am easily distracted, say,
by the discriminant, the bee-squared et al.
Concentrating on minutiae, I am lost in the well-
folded sleeve of the great poet's silk kimono,
lost on the silkworm's trail winding through Japan
and wonder, drunk, watching my steps split by Xeno,
drunk, wonder what led me to the simple numerical plan
and then away like dust in the path of a paper fan.

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Roches Moutonnees

They were the decisive icy fingers
of geology class brought home, stretching
into the parkway.
Soft forms, like yours under blankets now
in that bedroom so far away and so cold
I dream your breath condenses.
That the glacier digs out, at once,
a canal deeper and wider
than the slow shift
of water, its swiftness, appealed
even though its speed is counted by event,
a one great accumulated thrust,
and not the minutes, years of its advance.
Those remnant rocks on my route home from school,
the ones my childhood friends and I
used for first base or Alpha Centuri in play,
polished and grooved by the cold that changed
them became, one day, mysterious French
sleeping sheep, fleecy stone about to wake.
Oh the fairy dust of nomenclature
that gave me a moment when
I approached familiar landmarks anew, alert
to new shapes the new metaphor formed,
to how the name transformed susceptible stone.
From then on I gave them my grateful gaze—
there they lay, patient as ever, like you, my love,
writing: *oh to be sleeping with you, my beauty.*

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Two Poems by Adélia Prado

Purple

Purple puts on the squeeze.
Purple is tart and narrow.
Tyrant purple goes straight for the heart,
crazy for dawn.
Jesus's passion is purple and white,
very close to joy.
Purple is tart, it will ripen.
Purple is handsome and I like him.
Yellow likes him.
The sky purples morning and evening,
a red rose growing older.
I gallop after purple,
a sad memory, a four o'clock flower.
I round up love to turn me purple with passion,
I who choose and am chosen.

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Praise for a Color

Yellow infers from itself papayas and their pulp,
penetrable yellow.
At noon: bees, sweet stinger and honey.
Whole eggs and their nucleus, the ovum.
This interior thing, miniscule.
From the blackness of the blind viscera,
hot and yellow, the miniscule speck,
the luminous grain.
Yellow spreads and smooths, a downpour
of the pure light of its name,
tropicordial.
Yellow turns on, turns up the heat,
a charmed flute,
an oboe in Bach.
Yellow engenders.

—translated from the Portuguese
by Ellen Watson

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Kay Ryan

Yellow

Yellow is the most
primary of the colors,
owing nothing to any
of the others. Many
descendants come back
repentant and sullied
to celebrate yellow's
anniversary, but yellow
is unapproachable, not
antisocial but not
interested in sitting
at the table with
tainted yolks or
nouveaux chartreuses
or any of the other
abuses of the palette.
Yellow's indifferent
to blue's inducements
and despises orange,
red's bastard coinage.
He's selfish, yes you
could say he's selfish:
but it is Spring's wish
just at this brief
first note before her
fantasia to soft petal
every shade but acacia.

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Two Poems by Tory Dent

Vissi D'Arte

I asked you to have faith in me!
But the four corners of the world smile dumbly.

Envious as the mountain
of water's movement at its feet,
spring leaves turn bitter green
snapping in the wind of their own volition—
a maelstrom at the height of malaise.
Ubiquitously, it surrounds me like a moat.

While I, stationary and fretful as a star,
am compared to the incomparable night.
Haven't I carried your wish this far?

Plucked out from the throng of circulating souls
you pulled me down and funneled me into flesh
with sagacious eyes, with lips that nest,
with hands mimetically guided by a force
I'm forced to follow to the end of pencils
as they sink into sheets of bridal-white paper.

Upon the cherry wood altar, the quadrupedal desk,
I've obeyed the laws of light.
I've listened to the weather's nonstop chatter,
to a lacustrine acoustic ensued.

And in the salt box house I've built from scratch
where the past fills my room like a radio,
I've kept in the window a lamp that's always lit
believing you would see it,
this burst of flashing behind my ribs.

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Ocean Park

Wrong shirt at Ocean Park—
what you want preps an elementary doxy
for dogmatic chasing.
I've sold my hair, bowed to the brogue
of dreams and agreed as a mermaid
would to walk on knives.
Good dagger be good to me.

I get into the elevator at your feet.
I and the thousand souls of I.
My imagined heart is a china aster,
a dime on the staircase of the Metropolitan.
A woman's fragrance revolves in the lift
"Blue Tiger": tender yet rebellious.

Take me gladly, like a chessman.

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Harte Weiner

The Vodka and the Gin

Their tracings, nearly identical.
Knowing, tonight
if I start with one I should carry through,
but unsure to go with the tastelessness
of the usual spinal, or the drill through the pine
insistence of the gin.
And wanting more choice, means
getting one's balance, putting on shoes
kicked off wherever they fell—
so let's be limited, like when we picked
two crayons only
in art class; with those colors, drew the world
as we saw it from the L-shape of
their finished pine guard.

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Linda Pastan

The Sirens

Is there no music now
except the chime
of coins in the pocket
for which a man would go breathlessly
off course, would even drown?
Odysseus tied to his mast
regretted his own foresight.

In ordinary days to come in Ithaca
the song of some distant bird,
the chords of water against
the shore, even Penelope
humming to herself at the loom
would make his head turn, his eyes
stray towards the sea.

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Rita Dove

Stargazing

The sky is not a glass of anything;
it winks, it's a parable,
the kind your mother told whenever
you'd been "wicked"—intense
but vague. The night sky swerves
to its seat, the show begins:

The Pleiades:
Seven zeros make zero—that's what
we are. Seven opportunities
to drown in, seven ways out—
don't look too hard, we'll blur.
There's more of us than meets
the eye, a spreading rash
on the shoulder of a stubborn man.
Taken apart, we're nothing
but fire and air.

Cassiopeia:
Take it away! This is somebody else's
nightmare. Can I be blamed
for wanting more? How else
stay young? My daughter, helpless,
outshines me in her willingness to serve.
Let her embrace her strong young man
and go. I'm chained to my chair.

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Andromeda:
This crag's an adamant bed
but I'm grateful, grateful, at least
for my fingers, squirmed free of cuffs,
which heft the smaller stones to smash
the sea. Brave shining face above
your butterfly horse, descend
and fight like a man. Take me
and I'll be your lover, slave, diviner,
as you wish. This
is what's known as being
between a rock and a hard place.

Taurus:
An itch blooms just
out of reach and I lumber on,
forcing it underground.
Muscled neck and shoulders,
boulderous head: no one opposes me.
Breath of crocus, horn of iron:
lust disposes where it can.

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Tess Gallagher

All Day the Light is Clear

Today I wished without mercy
in the bloodless nations of the mind
that a city had gone down with you
as in a war fought—not
on foreign soil, but here
in the part of the country I can't
do without. Then, if I wept for you
inexplicably, as I have
on street corners, I could say the name
of that city and ignite in the memories
of strangers a companion
sorrow. "Yes," they would say, "Yes,
we know," giving again that name
like a fountain
in some dusty village where the women pause,
dash water across their brows,
and pass on.

And though I shame such power and force it
from my mind, you enter this street
as a touch on the shoulder, a stare that
speaks, or in the brief nods
between workers at change of shift.
I lean on their conquering faces.
I add you to the heap, to the beautiful
multitude for whom only singing
and silence may serve, those
of our city—city of the unmiraculous,
undiminished belonging, toward which
in the green fields—as did the women
of Leningrad—I bow, bow again
and make no sound.

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Joseph Brodsky

To Urania

I.K.

Everything has its limit, including sorrow.
A windowpane stalls a stare; nor does a grill abandon
a leaf. One may rattle the keys, gurgling down a swallow.
Loneliness cubes a man at random.
A camel sniffs at the rail with a resentful nostril;
a perspective cuts emptiness deep and even.
And what is space anyway if not the
body's absence at every given
point? That's why Urania's older than sister Clio!
In daylight or with the soot-rich lantern,
you see the globe's pate free of any bio,
you see she hides nothing, unlike the latter.
There they are, blueberry-laden forests,
rivers where the folk with bare hands catch sturgeon
or the towns in whose soggy phonebooks
you are starring no longer. Further eastward, surge on
brown mountain ranges; wild mares carousing
in tall sedge; the cheekbones get yellower
as they turn numerous. And still further east, steam
dreadnoughts or cruisers,
and the expanse grows blue like laced underwear.

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Marguerite Landmine

Janet Kauffman

Marguerite took her show on the road, a last tour, to end at the Capitol, where the senior senator from Rhode Island had arranged a performance for the combined Houses. Outside of Wheeling, Marguerite pulled off the highway and climbed into the back of the van, where she pulled her arrival costume from a plastic bag in the drawer numbered 1. She changed in the brief moment it took a tractor-trailer truck to approach the van, rush by with a dramatic waffling of winds, and reduce itself to a small square ahead, which continued reducing itself to the east. It's possible the driver never saw the van, with its sides and doors painted the legendary colors and shapes of Blue Ridge Mountain.

Over the years, Marguerite had found innovative ways to transport her props and equipment, even the most elaborate sets, in the small compartments of the van, which she painted and repainted in rented garages, city to city. In interviews, Marguerite acknowledged the van as an accomplice, nondescript, the one which effected the fabulous disappearances she'd managed all her life. She didn't acknowledge much else.

Rhode Island claimed Marguerite, because the state figured

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so fully in her performances; but the archives revealed no record of birth or residence there, and Marguerite preferred to ignore specifics. "I'm a genetic maelstrom," she said. "I was spat from a pond's eye." Or sometimes she said, "I was spat from my mother's eye."

And she looked it.

In her arrival costume, a dragonfly draping arrangement of fabrics and papers, whoever she was in herself was no longer a matter of interest. There was no discerning. She worked her own metamorphoses, not with the leisure of nature, but with the jolt and high-voltage twist of machinery, a shock like the stamping of sheet metal into a car door, the electronic *ping* of soldering, microscopic—a mime of state-of-the-art technologies. Her paraphernalia folded and self-compacted, and opened up at a touch. Marguerite called herself, in some states, Marguerite Origami, she had such skill, such constructive know-how. Engineers working to make it big in the pop-up book business studied her sets; and it was with as much generosity as arrogance that in book towns Marguerite flung out some of her work into the crowd, the miniature pieces with smooth, curved edges and a fullness of body, the texture of skin, the folds and collapses of paper—and the engineers said it *was* paper—imperceptible.

But elsewhere, her posters announced: Marguerite Landmine; Marguerite Prefab; Marguerite Rhode Island.

Crossing the new and reconstituted Tuscarora Range, with its elaborate hangings and camouflages, with its wide-spanning palm-like pines developed for the East, Marguerite felt the pain in her legs that had recently signaled trouble. First came the hints, the alarms, of the pain, and then up from the feet, an encroaching blankness, a loss of touch. She slowed the van and kicked each leg at the knee. The nutmeg, autumnal scent of her boots lifted through the wrappings of costume. The pain held off. She pressed the accelerator to the floor.

Housing developments, roof to roof, under the palm and finger pines, slurred by the window, and driveways blinked short spans of asphalt, broken lines on either side. The van streamed down the road, a bit of scenery on the loose. This

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was the way Marguerite advised her fans to travel, in the guise of landscape, since there was none; in the recollection of Rhode Island, the ancient place, whose name now had assumed such mystery.

Marguerite was speeding. Soon enough she heard the sirens of police in pursuit. She exercised her knees once more, and pressed the accelerator with renewed force. In the rearview mirror, however, she saw it was not the police, not a battery, but one motorcycle cop, and she adjusted the mirror for a better look. She eased her foot from the pedal.

What she thought she had seen, she easily verified: the cop wore no ballooning helmet, no gloves. He was not regulation. She watched his fingers comb and push at his hair, which was long enough to blow in strips across his face. His motorcycle veered with this gesture, and she saw, instantaneously, as if she had contrived it herself, the steel plates of the motorcycle snap into gold, a textured gold, like the straw of old hats, the straw still found in the last barns, in the deserts.

Marguerite pulled onto the shoulder. She watched in the mirror. "Little van, he's a beauty," she said. She could see the flesh on his wrists. She hummed to herself, "Oh, Rhode Island . . . dum de dum . . ."

He parked the motorcycle behind the van and loosened his orange police vest, straightened his shoulders. In the rearview mirror, Marguerite watched as he raised an arm and waved at her, like a boy, in that circle. She watched his hair blow around his face in the gusts from passing vehicles, and she noticed he touched the side of the van as he approached, as a person might touch, tentatively, a pond surface nowadays, to test if the pond were a water pond.

At her window, he said, "They told me you couldn't be stopped." He put his hands on the window ledge, all of his fingers inside the van, and Marguerite breathed on them.

"That's right, I can't," she said.

"You're still on your way, then," he said, and he extended one hand inside the van, towards her hand, the old-fashioned greeting.

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Marguerite took his hand, and the fragrance of skin, so much more complicated than any perfuming, swept through the van, and she leaned back in the seat, to inhale. The boy, too, pulled back for a second, and then pressed his other hand over hers and breathed an open-mouth breath, like a sigh.

"You haven't lost your senses!" Marguerite said.

"No!" he said, his voice hushed, abruptly.

"Get in!" she said.

With the windows rolled up, the traffic outside withdrew, a muffled sound, distant, oceanic, with tidal approaches and declines. The boy took off the orange police vest, and they sat there, apart, touching each other's arms, the fine hair on the arms. With both hands, each pressed the skin along the curve of the other's jaw, and touched the ridged, tendoned sides of the neck, following the collar bone's slight angle until the skin warmed towards the center of the body, and the fingers of their hands met there, pendant, and Marguerite's arms and the boy's arms lay beside each other, between each other, like the lengths of bodies.

When Marguerite opened the boy's shirt, it shook in her hands and crumpled away into folds, like her own fabrications, designed not for wear but for dismantling. The boy pulled the thread on her shoulder which separated her costume into its patterned sections, and lightweight, the papers settled against the door, blown there by their breathing. Every breath, though easy and silent, brought with it the rustle of onionskin, feather, crepe paper, and foil.

"I knew your skin would be like this," he said, and he pressed his cheek against her belly. He took her hands and wound them around his back until the palms of her hands, on their own, felt their way along his spine and down the sides of his back, down his thighs.

They rolled themselves into the open space, the small room of the van.

"You are scenic!" Marguerite said. And she traced the veins in his arms the way she had traced on antique maps the rivers of Rhode Island.

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When they kissed, the boy touched the slope of her breasts and the ledge of her knees. And he said, "I have dreamed the prairies I've seen in books. I've walked through them."

"Yes," she said, "Such kisses. We could have traveled! But I'm old, you can see it. My legs are beginning to lose touch."

He rubbed her legs, he wrapped them in his. They stretched out beside each other and worked themselves into and out of tangles. They languished; they kept pace. All afternoon, the noise of their bodies continued, primordial, with something of rock and something of water in it.

Outside, to the passing traffic, the van and the motorcycle, in their fantastic colorations, appeared, if they appeared at all, like a billboard, a painted picture of bygones—a straw bale in a field, and there, as backdrop, the shadow, the rise of Blue Ridge Mountain.

When they pulled apart, only their toes and their fingers touching, Marguerite said, "You won't be surprised—I have made some birds exactly like birds. And creatures. But—no!" She reached for her ankles, as the pain entered there, and then with a sharper pain, drained away. Marguerite gripped her ankles, but they were not there, not to the touch.

The boy rubbed her feet and kissed them and rubbed them again.

He said, "Are you sure you want to go on? Let me drive."

Marguerite, with a flick of her arms, drew on her costume, and the boy dressed, too.

She rested her feet in the boy's lap, and as he drove, he held them there, scuffed them, and worked to keep the legs warm.

"It's no better," she said.

The boy said, "Can you walk? If you want to go on, I'll help you."

At the Capitol, he backed the van up to the loading dock, and while Marguerite sat with her hands on her knees, her eyes shut, the boy greeted the representatives and carried cartons onto the stage.

When the houselights dimmed, the boy walked Marguerite onto the stage, his arms supporting her. She withdrew the

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feathered birds from small cages and loosed them. Several senators stood up, to catch the prizes. And as the elaborate sets opened up, one after another, the house filled with the noise of paper and soaring. For a time, the boy watched the show as if Marguerite were elsewhere, not in his arms.

Four-legged creatures advanced from the wings and fed on corn. Birds flew through a Rhode Island wilderness, into the cities, and out again, to the distant swamplands.

"I must kiss your neck," Marguerite said. "The terrain—the terrain," she whispered, "is most beautiful."

Then the boy felt the weight, no longer buoyant, of her body. He felt her arms fall. He tore the brittle papers away, to let her skin breathe and warm next to his. He pumped the air from his lungs in and out, like a bellows.

When the crowd's attention returned from the birds and the unfolding scenery to Marguerite at the side of the stage, she lay like a woman, sleeping with a lover.

The members of Congress remained silent a moment, attentive.

Then of course they applauded, Marguerite Origami had so perfectly made a man, and a contraption in her own shape, there in his arms.

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Joan Murray

The Unmolested Child

They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
And discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul.

Prelude

Waiting on the stairs of The Mizpah Missionary Home on
Summit Avenue, the children of apostles played with
neighborhood kids and sometimes spread the gospel,
warming
up for the prodigious conversions on another continent.
Prior to departure, one boy had brought a hand generator,
and we would all connect, hold the metal railing of
the steps, a human chain out to the light pole, to test
our conductivity and our resistance.
He'd wind the rotor, send out waves of electricity,
jolt us and knock us down like the Easter Morning sol-
diers.
And quieter, inside, his parents gave us
threads to wind around two fingers. Easy to break
a few encirclings. But impossible,
the repeated bindings. A lesson on bad habits,
still retained from Sundays with The Good Samaritan
and the even better candy in our hands.

And each six weeks the sermon changed,
the family was replaced. There was the girl,

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for instance who made disciples of the boys. Who taught
a lesson to us girls on envy. She used her breasts,
pale and long. She lay with Huey Lally in the sun.
She had probably seen it done in Africa. A most simple
habit and routine. But seeing them lying in that state
in the public River Park, we the uninitiate and
unredeemed, were doubly shocked.
The boys strained their necks from the rock outcrop
we called "The Alamo" which overlooked The Harlem
River.
The sun was strong that summer. There was no
lightning bolt to get her. Six weeks we went ignored.

After she had gone, Huey got his cough.
He went insulted up and down our neighborhood.
We called him "Marbles." His voice had taken on
a sound like grinding glass. It was puberty,
we thought, this deepening that had come on with
shaving.
We made him pay though she had brought it on, of
course.
But then it progressed to where we couldn't call it off,
to where he showed me from his bed, the new
air rifle from his father, his plans for it as hollow
as his eyes. Before I left he signed
my eighth grade autograph book, "Ashes to ashes,
dust to dust." The next month he was dead.

And there it was, unmistakable, the connecting thread
from God who frowns on adolescent lust, who mistook
a desecration of his maiden, who
sent that boy a bolt we never wished him.
Not Nola Diaz and Kathy Smyth who loved him. Not I,
so crushed I wrote his mother something now forgotten,
that made her beg me to drop by,
to tell all the things she didn't know about him,
to keep him alive, she said.

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I

On a curbstone above a sewer I sit with my brother
while the sun gathers back its light, for
a moment intensifies, then retracts from our extending
shadows and climbs down behind The Harlem River.
Until it's gone, we'll watch the older boys contend
with sawed-off broomsticks and "spauldeens."
Where Woodycrest intersects our street, each base is
a corner sewer. The center manhole,
the unelevated pitcher's mound. They let us sit on
third. The ball is soft and no one will get hurt.

Then from behind us, like the sudden angel
whose low reconnaissance spots the children
on the cliff, or on the slim bridge above the rapids,
he appears, the artistic nursery scene: two periled
children and the angel intervenes to save, we all
presumed, and not to push. But notice his finger.
How willfully it points at me. The same gesture which,
with matured iconology, we'll recognize in those great
depictions of unsettling authority: where it
points the lounging Adam from the comfort of
his loam. Points the tender Mary from her tranquil
broom and dust. Points the tender boy to man artillery.
I want you, says your uncle. His gesture
clearly to distrust, but I was six, and schooled toward
the comfort of strangers. And here a strange man
needing, that night to get engaged. A man who in
a nearby basement had lost "a blue diamond ring"
and asked me if I'd help him find it.

No matter the huddling girl on the front stoop
as he took me to the alley of my building. No matter
her plea, "Don't go with him." How matter of factly
he took my hand and told me, "Don't be afraid."
I was no coward: I watched stickball.
She lived around the corner, played with dolls.

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My brother tagged along. But that was useless.
The stranger set his hopes on me. He squeezed
my hand, exercised his authority, gave directions
to my brother to search the yard where a cracked
couch and matching chair waited for the junkman's truck.

And I went with him. Into the second basement,
past the dark storeroom that held my grandmother's
bridal bed with pineapples on its posts,
past where the dumbwaiters waited in their walls,
to where the boiler room was darker. And there
he stood before me, positioning me, eliciting a
promise of secrecy. I still was calm. But then
an actual angel came. I grew afraid and ran.
Not knowing why. Up to my apartment
terrified, unable to explain, except, "There was a man."
My father and my uncle Marty raced down the
stairs, understanding that danger I could not describe.

Three weeks I had to stay inside. Then it was the police
in a car with lights and all, that took my brother and me
to the station. And there was their suspect
on the stoop of the 44th precinct, between four men and
the tall globes of justice that still face the river.
Identification was expected.
I wore my newest sundress with alphabet letters,
and was sure of almost twenty-six. They said he had
confessed. But his face seemed tanner, his hair
seemed longer. It wasn't him, I said.
My brother, undecided, sided with me. We were told
the other girl had recognized him: She, the one who
played with dolls. That night they had to let him go.

I was then, what I took for, a celebrity.
And dangerously took my friends to see the refreshment
stand his family ran under the shuttle El near
Macombs Dam Park, just north of Yankee Stadium.
He had a history of taking small girls in the dark

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and doing what I didn't know. That thing
that enraged my father so, that made my mother
whisper over the one washer in the basement laundry
room,
that thing I'm sure that huddling girl
could have told. But I never saw her.
The more reliable witness, who moved away that summer.

II

Tie to tie I walk the tunnel
from its mouth on The Harlem River where we'd
broken in, to Anderson Avenue on the other
side of the neighborhood, passing under my father's
couch as he naps between his jobs at the center of
One hundred sixty-second Street where, deep below,
the newly abandoned IRT tunnel bends into its darkest,
and I go: an assignation.
I spare him the expense of worry. Let him sleep
above me like the bearded God who gets
winded at our games.
I will emerge whole from beneath gas lines and
sewage pipes, and will boost myself up from the track
to the open air platform, and there remember waiting
once
early in the morning with my mother
and seeing the elongate spokes of the rounded iron
fence, I took it for an emblem of the sun.
Fierce and glorious. I did not apprehend
it stood against intrusion. I had taken
it as art, meaningful and useless, at an age
when I still knelt on subways and stared
into that dark and was good at taking
the occasional flicker in.

Now on the platform, corrected by
that fence, I regard it as a barrier, perceive
some loss of innocence. I wait here for a boy,

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thirteen like me, sent down the eastbound track
while I walked down the west.
Pyramus and Thisbe in our jeans, we went, though
of course, we'd never heard such things.
And now I could not hear his footfalls,
though he must have been there, just to my left.
Only the seepage water running down the walls,
the recurrent hum of hotboxes lying
in the tracks, charged still with electricity,
I was careful to step over.
A quarter way I went. Looking back at what
was light. And the next quarter at the hardly light
dying into the solid dark of the tunnel's bend,
and there the absolute aloneness magnified.
Only the ties counted outloud with sneaker feet kept
my heart intact. Oh how it beat until that first
barely and doubted light was real and finally there.

And I arrived too frightened to entertain desires
that my friends back on The Harlem side would be
imagining for me in this tunnel of love, of our
breakings and enterings, where I realized
there was no one else but me.
Not once did I fear for him or picture how he might
have touched something dangerous, forbidden, how he'd
been terribly burned, or how, halfway turned,
a loss of will. I knew I was abandoned: I was being
joked at. Or at least rejected. The rules were
broken. The board bumped, its pieces strewn, and I
marooned at the far end of a tunnel where he would not
come, I knew. And yet I stayed there much too long,
rummaging my head for some prescription gleaned from
teenage comic books. But there was no reference yet
to the old tunnel, where she always waits
for his arrival. The game was over early. The winter
sun soon gone from the barricaded station.
And no way back but to take that dark again.

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III

It was Kathy Shackel who was caught
in *The Daily News* with a tissue at her nose.
Tomorrow she'd be explaining she simply had
a cold, but the photographer had waited for some
symbol while we stood so stoically on the steps
and the summoned baritone and tenor wove
those woeful Latins in the loft.
It was Roseanne Breen whom we'd least expected
to be at the center of such a scene.
Roseanne Breen, only eleven, her integrity so
intact that she never played at the forbidden river
where our parents would not let us go.
Never posed there in her bathing suit
for the man who claimed he'd come from
Confidential Magazine:
that year we had thought we'd all be famous,
and so trustingly, we thumbed those seamy
pages and grew impatient and confused as we
waited to appear. Then one of us concluded:
we had been used. Maybe we had known it
since that day we so eagerly made
fools of ourselves, smiled and moved
the way he told us, displayed our naivete.

And now it was Kathy Shackel in the centerfold
and Margie Daniels quoted on page three for
what her mother had seen while Margie was
with me at the river, and we were endangered
only by the current, the cliff and tracks.
Coming home with sacks of groceries that afternoon,
Mrs. Daniels noticed a stain on the mosaic tiles near
the stairs, and found beneath them, a naked child
so stabbed and bloody it could not
be recognized. She thought it was her own.

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What could our parents say? We who had
disobeyed, who had gone out where all their restrictions,
all their predictions of jeopardy applied,
instead were safe. And she who had dutifully stayed home
to do her homework was now inside
the box coming footfirst down the steps.
The nextdoor neighbor had confessed. He, the father
of two small girls, who were not there that afternoon
he made an abattoir of their living room.
But he never had entered her, he argued. Never had
penetrated her, he said. So Roseanne Breen, who was
so featured in *The Daily News* that none of us
forgets, who was eleven when we saw her last,
is unmolested still.

IV

Complacencies of our Saturday afternoons,
we'd drop beneath the landing of the footbridge
where it pauses on the retaining wall between its
crossings of the Deegan Highway and the Central
tracks that ran along The Harlem River.
And there, congenial on a shelf of concrete where
a slip would have had us on those tracks,
we sat, prolonging conversation with conventional
slang. Or inventing insults. I was good at that.
And maybe someone passed a can of any beer for all
our unrefined distaste. Boys spat. Girls combed their
hair. The Camels and the Lucky Strikes got shared.
Every gesture, every posture was arranged,
the orchestrations for our fourteen years.

And then from that narrow line, Billy MacDonald,
loud, tall and a little overweight, would rise, begin
to pace, then haul himself onto the bridge
and we would follow, to watch for Frieda.

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Frieda who would soon crown the steps, her breasts
heaving beneath her sad and European face, her
alien slacks too tight above dismal oxford shoes.
A girl, we others would usually torment, but now
we were silent, watching gravely the immensity
of her descent, her downcast eyes, her
hurried intent to run our gauntlet unabused.

And he, too, would say nothing to her. Act almost
as if he didn't know her. Precede her clumsily
over the steel railings. Not take her hand.
Not help her jump from the concrete abutment
to the slope that led to the shuttle tunnel entrance.
Not hold back the flap of metal curtain
we had cut. Not turn to see if she had
squeezed successfully through the iron fence we'd bent.
And yet how willingly she went, for what that unlikely
boy could activate below the tapped-out changebooth
in the eerie airless room where we'd found
a welded crate still filled with workmen's tools.
For some movie we had seen, we named it "Kali's Tomb."

We could, of course, picture, despite relative
inexperience, what was exchanged there: what passed
between lips and hands, what leaned against
the wall, what was built and what was spent.
But there was something more. And we were ignorant.
When she'd come out alone (He'd come out later),
we would stare, feel smaller in the presence
of what she'd got in there, now emergent from
that sybilline cave with all that wisdom so distending
it raised her head, her shoulders, as she rose
from the river on her shell, self-absorbed and
unaware of us. With all that interior
knowledge. All that conviction she was loved.

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V

An unprecedented vantage. From here a child could scan
all
the architectonics of The Harlem: the disjunct perspective
of buildings not yet burned, and down to her left,
The Yankee Stadium. And The Polo Grounds
still standing to her right, and, closer,
The Wilson Tower where neighbor wives
bring to light *The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*
and still are home by five. And the meat
loafs in its pan. And each thing finds its place.
It is rare at that height, where she is transfigured like
Christ in space, on "a pinnacle of the temple" or the
"exceeding high mountain" where he was bribed with all
the kingdoms of the world, unlike this girl who's come
for a candy on a stick and the promise of a dime.

Both will do what's expected.
The world will sigh and hurl on as planned.
When Lenny Freitag phones to say what's turned up
on the concrete canopy above The Projects' door,
below twenty-one floors, it won't be Christ,
and I'll reflect on Michael Maydie's eyes,
pointed out to me outside the A&P, just before the
bus doors closed. Visibly insane, only eleven, did
it take another child to know?

And I will redefine a high view, reshape at ten
the topography of The Harlem to include the
incomprehensible
need to simply kill someone, and the insubstantial
cohesion of the body, and the rotten
luck of election. And we will say how fine
she looks, a child of six with her hair

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so fashionable curled, her left cheek hardly
broken. Her sister Rita who sits next to me in class, by
contrast, will be paler, thin. Haggard by graduation.
The other sister will grow fat, her name forgotten.

But held aloft now, over the ledge, Kathy Hagman
can see at once all the bridges of our Harlem, the lengths
we all have crossed: The Washington, Third Avenue and
Macombs Dam. The IRT shuttle bridge, soon left open,
the highway footbridge, and the older river one
with its aqueduct and arches that will one day appear so
famously in our high school Latin books, on whose
span the widowed Poe once walked, waving to demons in
the tide, and thought to make that walk his last.

But he turned instead through farmers' fields, across
the Bronx to the straw-stuffed bed we looked at once,
and wrote a consolation, an explanation for
all these things: the garbled lamentation, "Ulalume."
So let's be off to rave and run our circles, to clean and
put away the pans, to welcome, to our burned-out shelters
the pending, black ball that makes rooms for others,
to be gone before she lands.

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Glimpses: James Jones

1921-1977

The following interviews were excerpted and arranged from those conducted for "James Jones: Reveille to Taps," a ninety-minute television documentary, which was broadcast on PBS in 1985 and 1986. It was produced by J. Michael Lennon and Jeffrey Van Davis for Sangamon State University, Springfield, Illinois, and the Illinois Humanities Council in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Humanities. Lennon was the interviewer for the documentary; Davis was the director.

JoAnn Strange, *school friend*

I was in the seventh grade and he and two other students were in the eighth. We all lived in the same general neighborhood. We were walking home from school. It was a nice day, I think in the autumn of the year. He said, "Let's go up to the clock tower of the courthouse so we can see all around. It's wonderful." It sounded exciting but a little bit—well, I thought it was not quite approved that we should do that. I was a pretty timid, goody-goody type. We had to walk up several flights of stairs into the tower, but nobody stopped us or said it was

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wrong or anything. There used to be a statue up at the top—the statue of justice with the scales and the blindfold. Anyway I remember we looked out and this statue was huge. I was amazed at how big it was. Then we went up two more flights and looked out. And you could see far away. Could even see little towns in the distance. So it was worth the effort. I was really glad I went, especially after Jim became famous. I was doubly glad. Yes, this tower's no longer there. And they've changed the windows for air-conditioning and whatnot. So it's not really as picturesque a courthouse as it was in those days.

Frank MacShane, *biographer*
The house where the Joneses lived was just a few yards from the public library and he would go over there a lot. Vera Newlin, the librarian, encouraged him as a boy. There were lots of books in the house. There was a literary heritage in the family itself. His grandfather Jones had written a book, a curious document, about the illegality of the trial of Jesus Christ. And then Jones's father, the dentist, was a poet. And the two other Jones children also were writers. His elder brother, Jeff, wrote a novel which James Jones eventually showed to Scribner's and hoped they would take, which they didn't. So there was a kind of family enthusiasm for literature.

Anis Skaggs Fleming, *school friend*
His father drank a great deal. Many people were afraid to go to him for professional services. But he did pull a tooth for me. He was a quiet man. His mother was just the opposite. She was a joiner. She wanted to be in everything, it never made any difference what it was, she wanted to belong. What do you expect with a poor dentist struggling along to try to support a family and make a living and his wife joining everything? As far as Jim's home life was concerned it was nothing.

After the stock market crash they were in reduced circumstances to the extent that it was necessary for Jim to carry papers, do anything he could, find odd jobs. And it went on. He never had the car. He wouldn't think of inviting a girl on

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a date because he had no transportation. The librarian had an influence on him. A lovely person. Strict. She kept a good library and you could go there to explore. She gave him directions in books that he should read. She kept telling him, "Now Jim, you should read this book," and he followed.

Thorton Bline, *high school boxing coach*
I trained the boys for the Golden Gloves because I'd boxed as a young fellow. Jim came over. I worked at the newsstand at that time. Jim boxed with every kid you could drag in there. We took him to Terre Haute to the Golden Gloves a couple of years. His dad bought a couple of sets of boxing gloves. He'd wear them out, they'd get so much use. His dad said that was a good way to keep him out of trouble—we didn't have any entertainment for the young boys in that day like you do now. Jim was a pretty good boxer. He boxed as a featherweight and lightweight. He won several fights. Depended on Jim's mood. Everybody thought Jim was rough and tough but his biggest fault as a boxer, he'd get somebody in trouble, and then he'd step back. I told him a lot of times he could have won a fight by a knockout, but he'd step back and let the guy recover a little. I talked to Jim too. That kind of softened up Jim's rough talk. But he had been through some rough things.

Louise Lewis, *publisher of* Robinson Daily News
His father committed suicide in his dental chair. His daughter Mary Ann (that would be Jim's sister) found him dead in the dental chair when she went by his office after school on her way home. There was always sort of a mystery about his death. The girl came up every evening after school. He was very fond of her, and they would go together down to the grocery store around the corner to get food for their dinner. The mystery was why he would kill himself so she could find him after school.

Irwin Shaw, *author*
He talked about the Midwest with disdain. He obviously did not have a happy childhood. He talked about his mother with

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what seemed to me to be almost hatred. My feeling is that, in those days before the war, when a young man joined the army voluntarily it was because he was at the end of his tether as far as the rest of the American civilization was concerned. In Jim's case it was a very lucky escape. He found the structures that he could admire and in which he could live. He found a sense of authority he admired, a sense of power, a sense of comradeship with men, which had always meant a great deal to him. And the idea of violence close to the surface, which played a big part in all of his books.

Gloria Jones, *wife*
He was born gentle. He had the most terrible war for a young man to have gone off to. He had to kill a young man his own age. He wrote about it in *The Thin Red Line*. That did him in. I mean he couldn't stand that. He became such a pacifist after that. He wrote somewhere that bravery was the most pernicious of virtues because it forced men to do things that they might not do under other circumstances. He'd get so frustrated when young people felt they lost something by not going to war. He felt so sad for them because that isn't the way to find your manhood.

Anis Skaggs Fleming
After the war, Jim was quiet. In the back of his mind he must have felt, "What were we fighting for? Why did we have to fight?" He was wounded and received the Purple Heart. He spent a year or more in the hospital. Then he came back. Well, what did he have to come back to? Nothing. His parents were dead. I think his uncle Charlie took most of the income that Jim should have been entitled to. So he had nothing.

Sylvanus Howe, *childhood friend*
He came back after the war—Lowney [Turner Handy] told me he was drunk at the Elks Lodge, they threw him out or something. The Handys took care of him that night, to keep him from going to jail. That's where it started. Lowney wanted to

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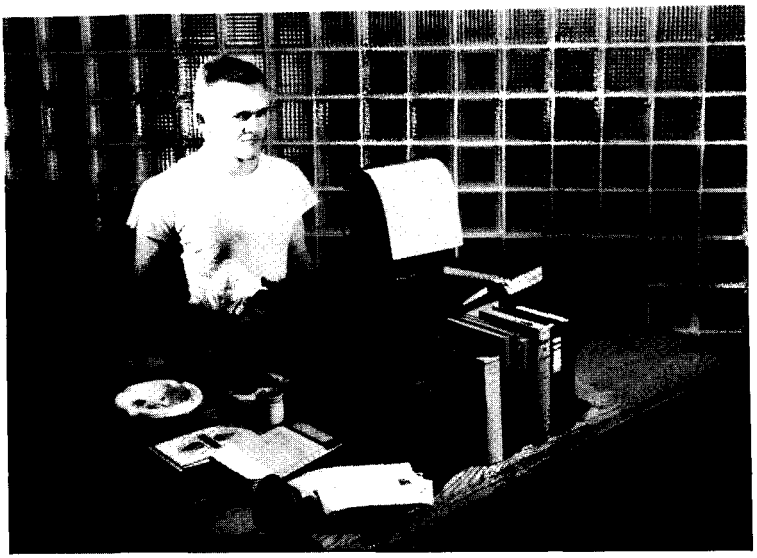

James Jones at his desk in the room added to the Handy's house, late 1940s.

write herself. She had a book that she wrote on for years—*From Riches to Bitches*, which was about the social circle in Robinson, Illinois. Parts of that book turn up in *Some Came Running*. But that's where it started. The Handys built a room on for him down at the house. Very nice place, patio; he had his own room.

Louise Lewis
Lowney took him under her wing. I think she saw something in Jim that she could make. She was noted for being a hard-working, unconventional person. She was an attractive woman, good looking, black hair, dark eyes. She didn't seem to care what anybody thought of her. She was a writer of sorts herself but never got anything published to my knowledge.

Belva Turner, *Lowney's sister-in-law*
She burned the book she had been working on. Yes. Burned it on the beach. In Florida. She decided she couldn't write.

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That was her way of giving it up. That's when she decided that she would help other people write since she couldn't herself. I don't think she ever wrote after burning that book.

Helen Howe, *wife of Sylvanus Howe*
She did his laundry and cooked him meals and gave him money in order that he could survive and that he could do what she felt he could do. I am certain that she satisfied his sexual needs as well simply because that was the relationship that came across. Jim was not the type of man that most women would like. Jim was tremendously chauvinistic although at that time I don't think anyone called him that. He looked upon a woman as someone who would satisfy a need, not necessarily a sexual need. Whatever the need happened to be. His laundry if his clothes were all dirty. Prepare a meal if he was hungry at the time. And, of course, with Lowney she provided for all of his needs. She satisfied any need that he might have at any given time.

Terry Crawford, *Lowney's niece*
Lowney would give you anything. You just asked and it was yours. My mother and I once took her to the airport in Indy. She was going to fly to New York. And my mother admired her dress. I'll never forget. It was a black linen dress and the next thing I knew she was in the rest room, came back out, gave my mother that dress, and she didn't have anything on under her coat but a slip. She got on the plane and went to New York with nothing on!

Margaret Turner, *Lowney's sister-in-law*
She had all sorts of ideas about health and diet. She liked to make use of everything if it was edible. She was a good cook. She had a marvelous collection of cookbooks which I have now, about a hundred and twenty of them. I can't remember her ever buying anything ready-made, pre-cooked. We had a big to-do when we started our restaurant in Robinson. She wanted us to serve French onion soup and things that you'd find in a gourmet restaurant, which this wasn't at all. It was ham-

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burgers and steaks and milk shakes and french fries. I doubt we could have sold a bowl of onion soup to anybody. That was about the only thing I can remember that we really had an argument about. I liked onion soup but it wouldn't have gone over very good in that restaurant at all. But she was a good cook and she made the most fabulous hickory nut cakes I ever ate in my life. And Jim was learning how to cook too and he appreciated good foods.

Sylvanus Howe
She was a hard task master. She'd get on his case. Get him up at four o'clock in the morning. He didn't get anything to eat until he'd written three hours. Nothing but weak coffee. She didn't want any food in his belly when he wrote. At nine o'clock in the morning he was done. In the afternoon they didn't work. She said they couldn't produce on a full stomach.

John Bowers, *author*
I don't think she could come in with a fine hand, go over copy, and direct or cut a scene and all that. That wasn't her forte. She could guide in a general direction. She got to Jones fairly early and tried to get him to write about things he knew and that were meaningful to him and to go deeply within himself, wrestle with it, and get it on paper. In that she was a marvelous literary influence. Otherwise, who knows. Whatever he would have done—potboilers, poetry—I don't think it would have been as forceful or as meaningful unless Lowney had originally tackled him. She got him to find his true voice.

Mary Ann Newlin Crank, *friend*
Their relationship was taken for granted in our community—that it was an intimate one. You could see she was the dominant character in the pair. She was the one that told him what they would do. I'm sure that she did contact the publishers. She was helping pay the bills to help him get *Eternity* done. She and her husband. The credit I feel Lowney should be given is that she helped a young man for reasons that only she would probably know and today we have this work as a result of that.

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Helen Howe

Lowney called us one evening and said the galleys had come from *From Here to Eternity* and they only had a few days to get them proofed and back and asked us if we would come in and help. Jim had received a letter saying that he had to remove a certain number of four-letter words from the galleys. And so we're sitting at the table at Lowney's, four or five of us sitting around the table proofing galleys and every time we come to one of Jim's fantastic four-letter words we'd say, "The sentence says so and so. Can we take that one out?" "Hell, no." It turned out that he had to delete, I think, sixty-three and he only found fifty-one he'd take out. That evening was fun. We had a lot of fun with Jim's inability to express himself in accepted English. We worked until about three o'clock in the morning. And we got them done. We got through all the galleys. I'd never seen galleys before. I thought that was really cool. I still think it was.

Norman Mailer, *author*

In late 1950 or early 1951, my editor at Rinehart told me that there was a book that Scribner's was terribly excited about, a war novel, by someone named James Jones. Scribner's editor, Burroughs Mitchell, wanted me to read it and if I liked it to give it a blurb. So I read it. It knocked me down and half knocked me out. I thought it was an extraordinary book. All the while I was reading it I had a sinking feeling, "Well, you're no longer the most talented writer to come out of World War II. You've been replaced." Extraordinary sensation. I've always felt I understood kings losing their crowns ever since. So I gave it a blurb. It was a half-grudging, half-generous blurb, saying that it had marvelous qualities and serious faults, which of course it does, but that it was a terribly important book. Then afterwards I heard the title. I remember writing to Burroughs Mitchell and saying that I thought *From Here to Eternity* was a bad title. But I didn't meet Jones until maybe a year later, after *Eternity* had come out and had its extraordinary reception. Then one day when I was living down on the Lower East Side, Vance Bourjaily called up and said, "I'd like to bring Jim

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Jones over." I said sure. We met that day. I once wrote a one-act play about Eisenhower and Khrushchev called "Buddies." They were the only equals in all the world so they had to become friends. In a way Jones and I were the same. We had the same kind of experience, both young, both had written war novels, both had enormous receptions for their books. So in a certain sense we felt like the touchdown twins.

Mary Ann Newlin Crank
Jim was a hyperactive kid who ran kind of wild. He had been in boxing and he had done his own thing and didn't really care what other people thought apparently. Then suddenly he came out with this book *From Here to Eternity* that hit the best seller lists. Everybody in town who could read ran out and bought a copy or had their name on the list at the local library. Suddenly, Robinson had a famous author on their hands. Well, then stories started in about him. Memories of Jim. He became bigger than life. Suddenly people who had never known him were telling all these stories. I've often wondered where the stories came from because he really wasn't someone that was old enough for people to notice; he hadn't been around here except as a child and a youngster.

Max Henry, *childhood friend*
Q. Did you think it was kind of strange that Lowney Handy had this idea to have all these writers together up there? What did you think about that?
A. I'm going to pass on that.
Q. Okay. What did the people of Robinson think about Lowney?
A. I'll pass on that one.
Q. Last question. Would you say that the town of Robinson is proud of Jim Jones?
A. I'm going to pass on that.

Margaret Turner
Lowney moved up here from Robinson to Marshall and started the Colony about 1948. They built one or two barracks, but

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they kept adding. The swimming pool wasn't built the first year or the second year. I paddled around it, floating around on a rubber raft.

Belva Turner

The Colony started with just one little group of buildings. First they put the ramada up, I think, a kitchen and dining room combined with a big sort of a tent top to it, canvas top. They'd roll the sides up in summer and let them down in the wintertime. They had big tables in there. The boys weren't allowed in there until noon. They had to stay in their own little pockets where they worked. Little houses. A little bed, a desk, and book racks along one wall. And that was all there was in it and one chair. You weren't supposed to talk to anyone or anything. You could have a cup of coffee for breakfast but they didn't communicate with each other until after it was time to stop at noon. Then they worked in the afternoon. I imagine they had seven or eight there going through this at one time.

Photo by Pete Purinton.

Lowney Handy (seated), James Jones, and members of the Handy Writer's Colony, c. 1952.

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Mary Ann Newlin Crank

I didn't go until the Colony was a finished product. It was a very large home that Jim Jones had designed and built with the proceeds (as I understood it) from *From Here to Eternity*. Next to the large house was a smaller one, in which I believe Jim was trying to get the second book out. Then at right angles and across a gravel road was a long, low, one-story, barrack-type building. In there were small rooms approximately six by ten feet at the most. Each one had a bed and a table. This is where the would-be writers, the people who had joined the Colony, stayed, lived, slept, and did their work. You arose at five o'clock. You got out and ran, did some physical exercises, deep breathing—deep breathing from the diaphragm. A short period of that was done winter and summer. It was not comfortable when it was below zero but you did it. Then you went in and sat at a typewriter, and you took a novel already published by a known author and you copied it, page after page. Sheets and reams of copied best sellers. For instance, you copied Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald. Hemingway was the favorite. She saw another Hemingway in Jim. Her energies were all directed into making Jim into a second Hemingway. Scott Fitzgerald was the second favorite. I copied more Fitzgerald than anyone else other than Hemingway. We did just a little Dostoyevsky, but I remember her criticizing me because I was copying Dostoyevsky too much and she didn't want us to waste our energies on Russian authors, good as they were. So it was just contemporary writers of the twenties, thirties and forties. You copied these famous authors' works for hours, until ten or eleven in the morning. Those who couldn't type had to copy the work out in longhand. Then you took a break. Then you came back to your own writing. In the evening, Lowney would go over what you had done that day. She'd check to see if you had copied the author's work and how much you had done. She was quite stern in this part of the effort. She believed that if you could copy long enough you would get a style. I once questioned her that if I copied someone too long wouldn't my style become his or her style rather than my own. I did not find that a good way to write. But of course I never published a book. So maybe she was right.

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Lowney's husband Hap [Handy] was superintendent at our local refinery and a very busy man. His contribution primarily was financial. He was the backer of the Colony. This is where Lowney got most of her money to help aspiring writers. Hap was very generous. If a writer wanted to go home for a weekend, for instance, Hap would dole the money out of his pocket for gasoline, meals, to get home and come back on, that sort of thing.

Belva Turner
Lowney was really the boss. She told them when they could go to town. She gave them fifty dollars once a month or so and sent them over to Terre Haute to the red-light district which used to be a very prominent place. When that was over they were back for their siege of writing again. That was their night out. And she'd finance it.

Margaret Turner
The routine at the Colony was early to bed and early to rise, nose in the typewriter all day, no distractions. We went out there by invitation only because we knew what the routine was. She kept them at it. She was a very strict disciplinarian. She was a firm believer in plenty of rest, plenty of water, early to rise, don't stay up all night. She drank a little cognac now and then. Something of that sort. I don't think she allowed the boys out there any liquor at all. I'll tell you one thing she believed in and that was enemas. Oh, yes. She got my husband started on those. I just don't believe in them. I think it destroys your natural ability. That's what eventually happened to her. And I think she realized it. She swore by enemas.

Helen Howe
Lowney's idea for a writer when you started was to do nothing for two or three months but type novels and books that were written by other people in order to get a style running through your head. There's a certain amount of merit there I'm sure. Jim told me once that he typed everything Hemingway and Fitzgerald had ever written before he wrote a line of his own.

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And perhaps it was to get them used to doing dialogue. I don't know why this was her approach to it but it was the way she thought it should be done.

Norman Mailer

If I were giving a writing course I might try having the kids copy passages from great books, as she did. There are worse ways to demonstrate that writing consists of an awful lot of dreary dull work and paying attention to small details. I went to visit the Colony with my second wife Adele and we stayed there a couple of days and met Lowney Handy. Like all legends, Handy's toughness was vastly exaggerated. She was terribly opinionated and, like all people from the Midwest, very proud of certain things, but a little uneasy about literary matters—probably because of that old tradition that literature started in New England and never went far away from there. So she would protect herself; she would be tentative. She handled me with kid gloves. Some very serious writers were there, and also some kids who were running a scam, who liked the idea of having free meals, a bed and some good athletics. They saw it as an open-air prison which they could get out of. The warden was Lowney Handy and that was pretty easy. Jones was serious as hell and in a funny way slightly defensive. I remember he said at one point, "I feel like a goddamn officer now. Now I know how those army officers feel; if I wrote *Eternity* today those parts would be a lot better and a lot different."

John Bowers

For us in the colony Jim was a hero, naturally. None of us had really published and we didn't know anything about literary figures. It was all a fantasy for us. We were terribly taken with the glamour of being a writer and so forth. Here was someone who had made it—a blockbuster best-seller, who could rattle off names of Hollywood figures. So we held him in a great deal of awe, just sheer awe. We looked at him and thought, "God, under that Panama hat is a million-dollar brain. Here's a guy who sits down at a typewriter, looks at a blank page and turns out marvelous dialogue."

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Photo by Lippman.

James Jones and Montgomery Clift, who played Private Prewitt in the film version of From Here to Eternity, *1953.*

Mary Ann Newlin Crank

Jim began a conversation. Lowney became suddenly very upset. She became quite angry and disturbed. Jim was defying her. He said, "But we're just talking." I could see that Lowney had all the control over Jim that any one person could ever have over another person in life. She claimed that she did not want us talking because we were talking what we should be putting down on paper.

John Bowers

You could never be a writer, or an artist, if you became a "householder." That was the term she used for being tied down. Once you were tied down to a woman, you'd never be a writer. It was all right to have a fly-by-night affair. You could go over to Terre Haute. Jones was somewhat rambunctious. He

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had moments when he would really rebel. He would take off in his convertible. I always wondered, "Why the hell break your back to get out of some place like Robinson and then come back and live in a more primitive way in Marshall?" If I had written *From Here to Eternity* and I could travel around a world which was my oyster and was that young and frisky and adventuresome and I knew life had a certain length, I wouldn't have stuck around, not at thirty. I would be out living life. I wouldn't have been in a bachelor home, having my meals, everything, dictated . . . I'm surprised he didn't leave her earlier.

Andy Turner, *Lowney's brother*
Well, when he left Marshall he took a lot of things with him—his gun collection. Of course, he gave me all the liquor and all his tools which included the table saw, I mean hundreds of dollars worth of stuff. Then they had an auction and sold some stuff. They sold the house.

Budd Schulberg, *author*
We met at Harvey Breit's. He was the associate editor of the *New York Times Book Review*. I felt that Jim was sort of lost. He was like the small-town boy in the big city. He came back and stayed in my apartment. He seemed at loose ends—somewhere between breaking away from his life in Illinois and not knowing exactly where he could break to.

Jim kept following me around everywhere I went. He'd say, "I'd like to go there." When I'd see Faye Emerson, he'd say, "Gee, I'd like to meet Faye Emerson." One night it got my goat. I had invited him more for a weekend than my lifelong live-in roommate. I asked him, "Jim, something is wrong with you." He said, "I'm lonely. I need a woman. Not just tonight. I need a mate. I need someone I can live with." I said, "What kind of a woman?" His sights were fairly high. "I'd like someone who looks something like Marilyn Monroe for openers but who is intelligent, knows writers, who's interested in writing, with a great sense of humor." As he went on, I said, "This is strange but you're describing a friend of mine. There's a woman

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called Gloria Mosolino who is a stand-in for Marilyn and wrote a fairly creditable novel. It could have been published. She's very interested in writing and writers. She sounds like the answer to your dream." I picked up the phone and I called her. I said I have a friend, someone who's in town for a few days. I said his name was James Jones. She said, "You know me well, Budd. Do you think I'll like him?" What I'm about to say sounds self-serving, and I'm always a little embarrassed to say it, but I might as well because it's true. I said to Gloria (I called her Moss for Mosolino), I said, "Moss, hold the phone tight and take a deep breath. I don't think you're just going to like him. I think you're going to marry him." True. A few weeks later they sent me a wire from Miami that they were on their way to Haiti to the Olafson's Hotel.

Gloria Jones
I loved his voice. He called and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm trying to write a novel." He said, "I'm wonderful at helping girls at writing novels," and he came over. We went to P. J. Clarke's. We spent the whole day. He said, "I have one more date"—I think it was to see *Long Day's Journey into Night*—and he said, "After that I think we're going to get married." And we did in three weeks.

Willie Morris, *author*
Gloria's from Pottsville, Pennsylvania, of Italian heritage, and one of the truly great women of America. It was the most exceptional marriage that I've ever observed. It was a life they shared of enormous fun and zest, of hard work and creativity. Marriages in the literary world have often been so fused with doom, tragedy and suffering, but this one was something to behold.

Helen Howe
We saw Lowney after Jim had married and left. We stopped one afternoon and visited with her for a while. She was tremendously sad. She was sorry that Jim's life no longer was in any way linked with hers. She was not ready to admit that

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Jones with Gloria in Haiti on their honeymoon, 1957.

James and Gloria Jones with Norman and Adele Mailer in New York, 1957.

James and Gloria Jones.

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she could not help him any further. But as I said before Lowney was a tremendously strong woman. I don't think Lowney really thought he wouldn't be back. Because of the intensity of their relationship, and also because of what they gave to one another. I think she never admitted that their relationship was finished.

Sylvanus Howe
Lowney was completely heartbroken. We dropped by and saw her at the Colony, my wife and I. You could tell she was completely broken. She tried to act like she wasn't but she really was. She didn't want Jim to get married.

Willie Morris
I met Jim and Gloria at a cocktail party on Central Park West in New York City. The air conditioner had broken down. It was the middle of summer. He said, "I'm going to take off my coat." I said, "Well, I'll take off my coat too." A number of the Kennedys were there. Ted Kennedy came over to me. Without my coat on he thought I was the bartender. He said, "I'll have another scotch and soda please." And I was so taken aback by this that I said, "All right." I fixed his scotch and soda. Jim Jones was standing there. He saw this little vignette. He laughed so hard that he had to support himself, his hands up against the wall. Later he told Ted Kennedy, "That fellow isn't a bartender. He's the editor-in-chief of *Harper's Magazine*." Kennedy came up to me shortly afterwards and said very graciously, "Mr. Morris, let me fix you a drink." Well, I remember the laughter. Jim Jones's marvelous Midwestern laugh. That whole scene was not lost on him.

Joseph Heller, *author*
The first time I met him was on a TV panel show in New York. He was very nervous then and so was I. We went to a bar for a drink. He was afraid that he might be tongue-tied. I said, "Well, I'm a big mouth when I get nervous." It's been true all my life. So I said, "I'll do the talking until you want to interrupt me." I never got the chance to say much. As soon as they

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said, "This is Mr. Jones," he started talking. It was all I could do to get a word in.

Irwin Shaw
Jones had a mystical feeling about his work. He felt that once he had put it down it should remain like that forever. Maxwell Perkins made him rewrite and change. Later on, I know from his editors who were also my editors, he was very recalcitrant when it came to making any changes at all in his manuscript. From that point of view, the technical point of view, he was very different from Hemingway. Hemingway was a minimalist. He tried to put in the least possible stuff. Remember his famous phrase, "A story should be just the tip of the iceberg, three-quarters of it should be under water." Jones was not like that. He was a maximalist. He liked to put everything in. There's something to be said for both schools. It depends how well these theories are put into practice.

William Styron, *author*
He's an indispensable American writer; he is embedded in American literature. He was a man of great limitations as a writer. The critics knocked him because of his inability sometimes to put words together as felicitously as they would have liked. But this didn't bother him too much. He had a vision and he pursued that vision unremittingly. And within the framework of the subjects that he had chosen to address himself to—men at war—I think that he will last as our best witness.

Willie Morris
There was never any doubt in my mind that he considered the war works to be the supreme part of his creative life. World War II was such an all-consuming event, perhaps the most momentous event in the history of the human race. Millions upon millions of men and women were caught up in it, many destroyed by it, consumed by it, and this small-town boy from Robinson, Illinois, has given us this stunning corpus of work, perhaps the most significant and distinguished corpus of work

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there is on that catastrophic set of years. I have absolutely no doubt it will be read and remembered and reread many hundreds of years from now because it tells people what those years were really like—not just on the battlefield, but in the bars and on the drillfields and in the military hospitals, the hospital ships—what Memphis, Tennessee, was really like in 1943. A substantial part of great writing is carrying the news from one generation to the next. Jones's war work has certainly done that.

Frank MacShane
John O'Hara was in the same boat; he was incredibly sensitive about reviews. So was Jones. When the bad news came in on *Some Came Running* and then worse news on *Go to the Widow-Maker*, he was really in some ways broken, I think, or very hurt. It was an element of his removal to Paris.

Gloria Jones
Some say we went to Paris because of bad reviews. It wasn't that. He stood by his books. He liked them. We stayed three weeks in New York on East 67th Street where the Russian consulate is now. We had always planned to go to Europe. He wanted to get as far away from Marshall as he could. The Colony had already cost him a couple of hundred thousand dollars. He had to get away from all that.

Rose Styron, *author*
Jim and Moss went off to Paris in 1958 just after my daughter Polly was born. They came to see me at the hospital. Bought me tons of champagne, got me totally drunk the night Polly was born so that I couldn't nurse for days. Then they waved goodbye and went off to Paris.

Their place in Paris was endless fun. You walked upstairs after you'd pushed the buzzer a dozen times and Jim would come down the stairs to greet you and Gloria would be at the top making you feel absolutely wonderful. You went upstairs into the crazy, plush living room filled with the kind of period furniture that you would never have guessed two Americans like

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Jim and Gloria would choose. And all around were the paintings by their friends, American friends in Paris, Parisian friends, big old fireplace, Jim's weapons and swords, wonderful dining table always set and full of fruit, books, and the telephone going all the time, and the pulpit bar that Jim took with them back to Sagaponack. He would always go right to the bar and ply everyone with drinks. Then suddenly the doorbell would ring and another guest would come, three guests, twelve guests, twenty guests. By the end of the evening there'd be ambassadors, poets, people playing poker. The house just full all the time. Jim and Gloria just made you feel better than anyone in the world.

William Styron

I think Jim was merely following the pattern of so many of us. He'd become close friends with other American writers who had been abroad. I'd lived in Europe for several years. I think he wanted to experience the same thing the rest of us had. The smell of Europe. America's a very provincial country, really. It's a totally parochial continent even now, but especially then. I don't think Jim ever got totally assimilated into French life. He didn't learn the language well enough, which is no criticism.

William Styron and James Jones at Biarritz in 1965.

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He chose not to. He certainly spoke a reasonably good French. But I think in order to participate you have to become nearly linguistically perfect. Jim never got to that point. I don't know if I would have either. He and Gloria lived on a kind of margin where they had many French friends and many American friends who came to visit.

Gloria Jones
Joie de vivre. He certainly had that. When he first met a French oyster for example, he ate four dozen. I thought he would die but he was so happy to eat. When he first had a bottle of wine at the Deux Magots he had four. He couldn't believe such a thing was so good.

Budd Schulberg
I don't think Paris had much effect on him. I think he was so set in his ways. He was Midwestern, small-town and no matter how many fancy threads Gloria might try to put on him, it didn't really change him.

George Plimpton, *author*
Oh, no. He was an American. He never seemed to me to make any concessions to France. I mean, the hat he wore had a leopard-skin band on it. You saw him in the street of the Ile St. Louis and you knew you were not looking at Toulouse-Lautrec.

Clem Woods, *author*
Jim's the most American man you could ever meet whether you met him in Paris or in Afghanistan. You'd know him for an American anywhere and he'd tell you immediately about Illinois and Indiana. The Parisians of the Ile St. Louis, where he lived, loved him. When he walked along the street they waved to him, "Bonjour, Monsieur Jones." They knew he was an American and they knew he was a famous writer.

Irwin Shaw
Gloria was the center of the house, she made it run. She in-

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vited everybody. She kept it open. As she once said to James, "I am the candle that keeps your house lit." While he was upstairs working away—he had a room upstairs where he worked in absolute privacy and you couldn't even reach him on the phone—she was arranging things, making life very amusing for Jones, for herself, for all their friends. The people who flowed through there represented the widest possible group of artists, athletes, and politicians you'd hope to find.

George Plimpton

You went up this long flight of stairs. I remember the main room being typically high-ceilinged, rather ornate dark paneling. It had French doors that looked out on the Seine. I can remember that you could see the tugboats go by and they had to lower their smokestacks to get under the bridges. You could see the mechanism of the smokestacks. The great piece of furniture in the house in Paris was the pulpit. I don't know where Jim got it—out of a church, I guess. It was a rather ornate heavy pulpit and he used it as a bar most of the time. In fact it sits here in the house in Sagaponack and is used as the bar

James Jones, Rose Styron, Bodil Neilsen, Irwin Shaw and Gloria Jones around the pulpit, 1974.

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for small parties. If you got on your high horse about something and you really wanted to make a statement and everybody was talking too loudly, Jim would say, "Let him take the pulpit." I never got into one of those arguments, but apparently if you did you stood behind it and you could give your anti-French speech or your pro-Algerian speech, or whatever was the topic of the time.

Norman Mailer

I think he made a terrible mistake leaving America. It was the fundamental error of his life. His roots were here. He wrote about the country. At his best he wrote about the country better than any of us. He had more claim to be called an indigenous American author than any one of us. Going to France, he dried out his taproot. He got into the literary world in the worst way. He was the literary celebrity of Paris for many years. You didn't count for anything in the literary world if you didn't visit his home when you went there. Jones had great

Photo by Le Centre culturel americain.

Jones with Sylvia Beach, Thornton Wilder and Alice B. Toklas in Paris, 1960.

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gifts for social life. He was a charming man. He could drink all night and get up in the morning and work. That was part of his doom. If you wake up in the morning and have too large a hangover to work, you recognize that you've got to give up one or the other. He didn't. He was somewhat stronger physically and, in many ways, emotionally than most people. That was part of what brought him down too early, I think, that he really had the confidence that he could do it all. And it was false confidence.

Paul Jenkins, *painter*
When he'd come down from his room after working all day he'd be like dead. Tranced out. Then little by little he'd come back. After a day's work he'd read his recent pages. He read the entire *Thin Red Line* to me and Alice Baber, an artist friend, and Gloria. We'd sprawl out on the floor. He never sat when he read. He'd get down on one knee, or he'd stand up, or he'd lean on the mantelpiece. He had a beautiful voice. That's what Gloria said: "I fell in love with Jim because of his voice."

Norman Mailer
Writers were enormously drawn to him because he wasn't like other writers. It was like dealing with a redneck who was as gifted as Byron. I'm exaggerating now because Jim was certainly no simple redneck and he was no Byron. Jones was like so many people that writers just didn't know, people who were central to America—whose mentality finally was to enjoy driving a car, who liked the smell of gasoline, who loved getting drunk and getting in a fight—win or lose, that hardly mattered—but they loved the smell of bar sawdust, when your nose is bleeding and you're stuck behind the cuspidor. Jones understood all that. We were all agog by it. There's something inextricably effete about the literary world of the East. So writers who lived in the East were drawn to Jones. And he in turn, with that terrible inferiority complex of Midwestern writers, was drawn to Eastern writers. So it was symbiotic. But looking back on it, I don't think it did him any good. I say

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this because I've tended to stay away from writers. The insularity of that world, and the envies that it generates are consuming. You live your life with blinkers and all you care about is whether so-and-so's book is selling or not selling. I don't want to get to the point where I live my life hoping that some competitor's book is not doing well.

Jones had his inferiority, I had mine. Mine was ethnic and his was, as I say, coming from the Midwest. His true inferiority, I think, was that he wasn't a college man, which is always half an asset and half a disaster to a successful novelist. You're never quite certain if you're bona fide. It's a little bit like coming from Brooklyn. Another difference is that he worked from his instincts, while for many years I worked more out of my intelli-

Michel Ginfray/Gamma Liaison

William Styron, Irwin Shaw and James Jones in Paris.

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gence and my analytic abilities, such as they were. Only later did I begin to feel that one had to work out of what one felt rather than out of what one could comprehend.

Jones was no intellectual. If he had an Achilles' heel it was that. If you're going to keep living and working as a writer and you've got talents as huge as he had, you simply have to recognize where your shortfall is, and he didn't. So he was always trying to beef up the intellectual side of his writing, which was lamentable because he was not an original thinker. He was a marvelously original novelist and he had a wonderful flavor. And he caught the middle of America as maybe no one else did in that whole period.

William Styron

Well, he had a strong sense of the dignity of life. It's one of those almost indescribable things. I think that, despite a certain cynical overlay in his books, he believed very much in the potential of human beings. He saw them as a bestial species at certain moments, especially when they went to war with each other. That, of course, was his great genius—to see what men did to each other *in extremis*. But at the same time he realized that we are capable of a lot of decency and therefore of dignity. This was reflected in his own personal life. He was a man of great generosity and of great tenderness. I loved being able to talk to him because he had such an intuitive sense of what made human beings tick. And I always felt that he finally had a great sense of hope for the species.

George Plimpton

He was one of the more relaxed people I can ever remember. Some people you meet and you feel, "Uh oh." Mailer, for example, is a man who is full of tensions and electricity and various other things. I've often felt a little bit uncomfortable with him. No, that's the wrong word. But with Mailer you never know what's going to happen. You can have a marvelous evening with him or you can have an evening that's full of *frisson*, full of unexpected turns and twists. But with Jones there was that homely marvelous face and you'd go up and he'd have this

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little smile, he'd shift his cigar a little bit. And you knew that he had something interesting to tell you. You knew you'd have a good time, and for sure that the evening would be an awfully long one. You might end up in the pulpit or you might end up underneath the pulpit. But you were going to remember the evening.

Clem Wood
Jim talked about and worked on *Whistle* for fifteen years before he died, but he kept setting it aside to do other things. He did the *The Merry Month of May* and he did *A Touch of Danger* and did *WWII*. At the end he really wanted to finish it. I always thought that he would be like Proust in that he would stay alive until he finished his work. He was trying to stay alive until he finished it, or not finish it so he could prolong his life. It was probably a surprise to him that he died before he finished it. Gloria was the aider and abettor and the animator, if you will. I mean there were times when Jim just said, "Fuck it," and he went off and I don't know what. Went to sleep or checked out, but Gloria was always there.

William Styron
A lot of his coming back to the United States had to do with his sense of the shortness of time that he had. He discovered his illness in my house on Martha's Vineyard in 1970. It scared him. I always felt that he had a sense that time was growing short and it might be best to come back here where his roots were.

Irwin Shaw
By that time he was not supposed to drink. He was on a salt-free diet. He knew his physical condition was deteriorating. Perhaps he wanted to settle down to a more quiet life. When you feel that you're sick you're liable to go back to your home country.

Willie Morris
There's a marvelous woman here in town named Squeaky who

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would cut our hair in the Vogue Beauty Salon. Jim once said to Squeaky shortly after they returned, "I'm glad to be home. I got tired of that fancy French life."

Jamie Jones, *son*
On Sundays at two o'clock on Channel 2 these great cowboy movies would come on. My father would get his cowboy hat, his pistols and his belt, and he'd put them on and stump around the house. Once the movies started we'd all be lying on the bed and he'd sit in his chair with his cowboy outfit on.

Kaylie Jones, *daughter*
As I remember when I was younger, he'd get up very early in the morning. It didn't matter how late he'd stay up at night. He'd get up about six or seven in the morning as we were getting ready to go to school. And he'd go up to his office which was upstairs in the house and he'd stay up there until about one o'clock and then he'd come down and have a bit to eat, just like a steak or a hamburger, nothing very heavy, and then go back upstairs and work until four or five. And then as he got sick and as he was trying to finish *Whistle* knowing that he was very sick he'd work sometimes from six to eight at night just straight through the whole day. He wouldn't slow down because he felt that the clock was ticking away. He was running out of time.

Willie Morris
He had early attacks of congestive heart disease. As with everything else, Jim became an expert on this particular heart condition. He read everything about it just as he would read everything about what happened at Appamattox between Lee and Grant. He was that sort of man. I don't think he had any illusions about his health. When they moved out here to Sagaponack he lived for another three years. He was working harder than any novelist I'd ever seen. Jim knew it was going to be a struggle against time to finish it. He put in eleven, twelve, fourteen hours a day, which is an awesome amount of time for a novelist to work. Then he would drift down from

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the attic and light up one of those big cigars of his and drink some white wine. He was killing off the old company in *Whistle*. In a curious way I often thought he didn't want to finish it. I had visions of Jim dying as he finished the last lines, you know, like Proust. But the very act of his killing off these men, the survivors of the bitter fighting of the South Pacific, was killing something in him too.

Budd Schulberg

He used to enjoy things; he used to enjoy parties, to enjoy drinking until he got ill. But then he would leave, leave because he would feel he had to go home and keep on working. Some clock was running, I think, in his head. What he set out to do he stayed with. Happy, and finally sick, he really had a very strong will and he stayed with it.

Photo by Jill Krementz

James Jones, Truman Capote, Willie Morris and John Knowles at Bobby Van's in Bridgehampton, 1975.

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Clem Wood

Toward the end, when he knew he was ill, he was diminished physically. He was short but he always seemed to occupy sort of an enormous cube in space. He seemed very frail then. He said to me, "I've had it. I'm going to go one of these days." I don't think he expected it to be as sudden as it was. There's a poem we liked. One of the lines is, "Ogre glaring across the poker table," or something like that. I can see Jim with his green eye shade on, the toughest, most terrifying poker player you could imagine.

Willie Morris

He had a very serious attack in January of 1977, five months before his death. He couldn't work as hard as before and he couldn't drink any more white wine. But he continued with his long old cigars. Then he started talking into a tiny tape recorder that our mutual friend, the writer Joseph Heller, had given him. Then he went back into the hospital for a final time in Southampton. Late that last night he wanted to talk to me and I went into his room. He got out of his bed and he had the tape recorder. He said, "I want you to sit here with me. I want to talk the conclusion of *Whistle*." Which he did in the most eloquent and precise way. He had it all thought out word for word, including Strange's death. You remember, he slips off the troop ship that's on the way to Europe and drowns. He had it down word for word. This took quite a long time and a lot of energy and it tired him out. He said, "Now, I know you're not good with these machines. Don't erase this by accident." Except his language was more vivid than that. When he died he missed by just over three chapters, but he'd left his notes and detailed tapes.

Irwin Shaw

The day before Jim died (he knew he was going to die that day or the next), a few of us had lunch at a restaurant in Southampton. Willie Morris had the notes that Jim had dictated and he had the cassettes into which he had spoken. Among the people present there were Willie Morris, Bill Styron, Peter Mat-

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thiessen, myself, my son who is also a writer, and several others. The question we debated at that lunch was how the book was to be finished. The publishers wanted one of us to continue as though it had been written by Jones. But the consensus of the meeting was that if somebody did that there would be some critics who would say, "Well, that's much better than Jones." And there would be some critics who would say, "Well, that's so awful that you're defaming the memory of James Jones." So it was a no-win situation. So we asked Willie to do it from the notes, frankly saying it was from the notes, using Jim's language as much as he could. That's how the book came out. Seems to me we made the right decision.

Willie Morris

Shortly after Jim died we had a memorial service in Bridgehampton. Gloria and the kids wanted a very fine bugler to play taps because of the connotation in *From Here to Eternity*. We called up the Assistant Secretary of the Army. He put us in touch with a general in the Pentagon. We wanted an enlisted man because Prewitt was one, in *From Here to Eternity*. The general was very nice. He said, "Well, we cannot accommodate you on *that* score because these days the best buglers in the army are master sergeants. But we have a very fine bugler here who's volunteered to come play taps for you at the memorial service. Sergeant Mastrolio is not only the finest bugler in the United States Army, but he's the greatest bugler in the world. He's sitting right here in the office. Would you like to talk with him on the phone?" He came on the phone and said he had never forgotten Montgomery Clift in the movie of *From Here to Eternity*. So Sergeant Mastrolio came. He had played at the funerals of three presidents, and a lot of taps in Arlington. That afternoon in Bridgehampton it was the most beautiful taps I'd ever heard.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Janet Kauffman is the author of a novel, *Collaborators* (Knopf), and a collection of stories, *Places in the World a Woman Could Walk*. She lives in Hudson, Michigan.

Lawrence Shainberg is the author of *One on One* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston), and *Brain Surgeon: An Intimate View of His World* (Lippincott). This story is excerpted from his new novel, *Memories of Amnesia.*

William Styron is the author of five novels, including *Sophie's Choice*, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, which won the Pulitzer Prize, and *Lie Down in Darkness*, winner of the Prix de Rome of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He is an advisory editor of this magazine.

POETRY

Judith Baumel's book *The Weight of Numbers* won the 1987 Walt Whitman Award and will be published by Wesleyan University Press in February 1988. A recipient of a 1987 Fellowship in Poetry from the New York Foundation for the Arts, she is currently director of the Poetry Society of America.

Joseph Brodsky won the 1987 NBCC Award for Criticism for his collection of essays, *Less Than One* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). His books of poetry include *A Part of Speech* and the forthcoming *Homage to Urania.*

Tory Dent is a graduate student in English at New York University. Her po-

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etry has appeared in *The New York Arts Journal*, *Some Other Magazine*, *Upstart*, *Apocalypso*, and previously in *The Paris Review*.

Rita Dove has published one collection of short stories, *Fifth Sunday* (Callaloo Fiction Series, 1985), and three volumes of poetry. Her most recent volume, *Thomas and Beulah* (Carnegie-Mellon, 1986), won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize. She teaches at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona, and is currently president of the Associated Writing Programs.

Tess Gallagher's volumes of poetry include *Instructions to the Double*, *Under Stars*, and *Willingly*. In 1986, she published *The Lover of Horses*, a collection of short stories, and *A Concert of Tenses*, a book of essays. *Amplitude: New and Selected Poems* will be published by Graywolf Press this fall. Gallagher teaches at Syracuse University.

Donald Hall was the first poetry editor of this magazine. His eighth book of poems, *The Happy Man*, appeared last year. In 1987 Hall published *The Ideal Bakery*, his first book of short stories, a verse play called *The Bone Ring*, and a collection of essays titled *Seasons at Eagle Pond*. "Prophecy" is part of a book-length poem entitled *Build a House*.

James Lasdun's short story collection *Delirium Eclipse* was published by Harper & Row last year. These poems are from his forthcoming collection *A Jump Start*, to be published by Norton next spring. His poems, stories, and reviews have appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Literary Review*, *Encounter*, *Firebird*, and *Fiction Magazine*.

Joan Murray's poems have been published in *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *The Hudson Review*, *Ms.*, *The Ontario Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and the 1985 Pushcart Prize anthology. She serves as a consultant for the New York Foundation for the Arts and as a literature panelist for the New York State Council on the Arts. Raised in the South Bronx, she lives in upstate New York.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) was a native of Mexico and a winner of the Nobel Prize. The three collections of his *Odes* will be published in 1987 by the University of California Press. **Margaret Sayers Peden** has translated Spanish American novels, essays and poetry. Her recent translations include Carlos Fuentes's *The Old Gringo*, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz's *Poems*, and Pablo Neruda's *Passions and Impressions*.

Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–1975) was a filmmaker, novelist, and poet. **Dino Fabris** is a poet and translator. He is a recipient of a Columbia Translation Center award for a translation of Pasolini's *The New Youth* (La Nuova Gioventù). "Italy" and "Ex Vita," which were published in *L'Insignolo della Chiesa Catholica* (1958), are reprinted with the kind permission of Giulio Einaudi Editore, Turin.

Linda Pastan's most recent book, *A Fraction of Darkness*, won the Maurice English Award. The poem in this issue will be included in *The Imperfect Paradise*, to be published by Norton in 1988.

Adélia Prado is one of the best-known contemporary poets of Brazil. **Ellen Watson** received a 1984 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship to

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translate the work of Adélia Prado, which has resulted in a manuscript of poems entitled *Live in the Ether.* She has translated six Brazilian novels, the latest of which, *High Art*, by Rubem Fonseca, was published by Harper and Row in 1986.

Kay Ryan has poems in recent or forthcoming issues of *Yale Review*, *Partisan Review*, *American Scholar*, *Poetry*, and *Kenyon Review.* In 1985 Copper Beech Press published her first book of poems.

Harte Weiner is a doctoral candidate in English at Stanford. She currently teaches at Tufts University.

Alan Williamson is the author of *Presence* and *Introspection and Contemporary Poetry*. "The Muse of Distance" is the title poem of his new collection, which Knopf will publish in February, 1988. He teaches at the University of California at Davis.

Franz Wright recently published a limited edition book of his poems, *Going North in Winter.* Selections printed here are from his new manuscript, *Winter Entries.* His poetry has appeared recently in *Ploughshares*, *Field*, *Ironwood*, and *Columbia Magazine*.

FEATURE

J. Michael Lennon is a professor of English literature and the director of the Office of Public Affairs Communication at Sangamon State University in Springfield, Illinois. He is the editor of *Critical Essays on Norman Mailer* (G. K. Hall, 1986) and of *Pontifications* (Little, Brown, 1982), a collection of interviews with Mailer. Lennon, also publisher of *Illinois Issues,* was awarded the 1985 Humanist of the Year award by the Illinois Humanities Council.

INTERVIEW

Zoltán Abádi-Nagy is an associate professor of English at Kossuth University, Debrecen, Hungary. His books include *Swift: The Satirist as Projector* and a study of American fiction of the 1960s, *Crisis and Comedy*. He has been a research fellow at Duke University, and has translated the works of Banks, Barth, Barthelme, Brautigan, Coover, De Vries, Federman, and Percy.

Regina Weinreich is the author of a book of criticism, *The Spontaneous Poetics of Jack Kerouac: A Study of the Fiction* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1987). Her work has appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Village Voice*, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, *Twentieth Century Literature*, *Soho News*, *Omni*, and other publications. She lives in New York and teaches writing at the School of Visual Arts.

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ART

Donald Baechler was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1956 and lives in New York. Recent one-man exhibitions of his paintings and drawings have been held at Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York, and Ascan Crone Gallery, Hamburg.

David McDermott was born in Hollywood in 1952, and **Peter McGough** was born in Syracuse, New York, in 1958. They live in New York. Exhibitions of their collaborative works have been held at Massimo Audiello Gallery, New York, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York, and Lucio Amelio Gallery, Naples.

Edward Ruscha was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1937, and lives in Los Angeles. Major exhibitions of his paintings, drawings, prints, and books have been held recently at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and Westfalischer Kunstverein, Munster.

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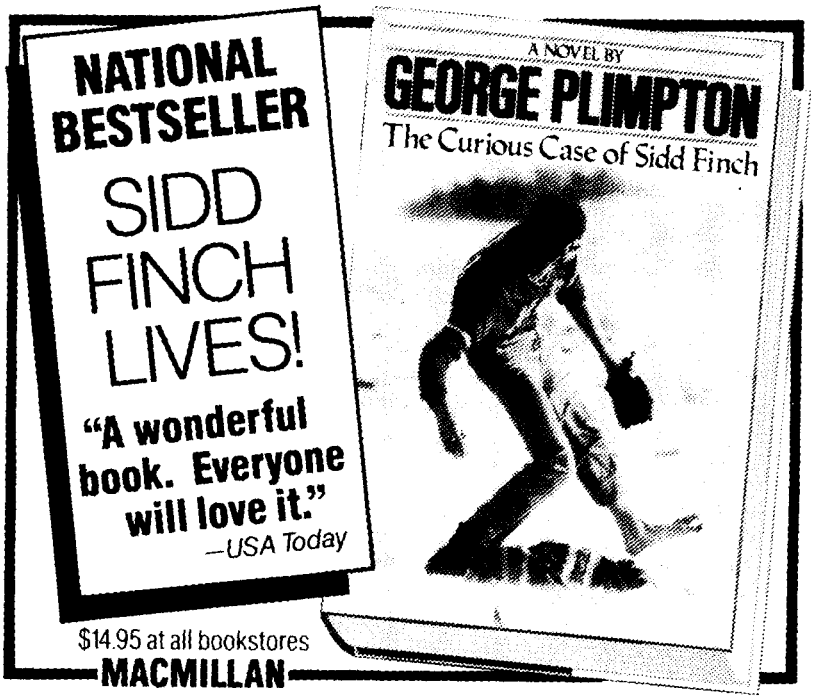

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